THE SHADOW OF RAM RAJYA OVER INDIA

By

PREM NATH BAZAZ

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Preface

Like other developing countries in the Third World, India is beset with numberless problems some of which appear unsurmountable. The distinguished leaders who formed the *avant-grade* of the forces which fought against British Imperialism have, after achievement of independence in 1947, ruled the country for thirty-two years. But none of the problems which deeply concern the overwhelming majority of the population such as widespread poverty, victimization of women, inequitable distribution of land, population explosion, mass unemployment, colossal illiteracy, rampant corruption, and high prices of essential needs of common man, has been solved.

Whether it was the Congress Government in earlier years or the Janata Government since March 1977, it has made little difference to common run of the people overburdened with cares of existence. Prominent economists who are not prone to exaggerate, hold the view on the basis of reliable statistics emanating from official sources, that the condition of poorer classes has been progressively deteriorating; over 45 per cent people stand below the poverty line where per capita daily income is as little as two rupees or less.

There is no gainsaying the fact that with the implementation of Five-Year Plans a number of projects for industrialization has been completed; many dams, big and small, to irrigate millions of acres of barren land have been constructed and production of foodgrains doubled ; laws to abolish absentee landlordism promulgated. As many as 30,000 new factories, large scale and small units, have been set up; science laboratories for research and development established and technological and academic institutions opened by the hundred. But it is equally true that despite rhetorical official propaganda to the contrary, the advancement has not benefited the

downtrodden classes of Indian society. It has either helped the capitalists to amass more wealth or at best enabled certain sections in the cities, large towns and big villages to be a trifle better; it has not improved the lot of the teeming, toiling, indigent masses living in six hundred thousand hamlets of the vast land. On the whole, as is repeatedly stressed by watchful analysts the rich have become richer and the poor poorer in post-independence era.

During the entire period of the freedom struggle, its leading lights enunciated policies, issued manifestos and adopted resolutions in annual sessions of the Indian National Congress describing the shape of democratic India which they conceived to build after termination of the alien rule. The Constitution adopted in 1950, laid down the outlines of the Sovereign Indian Republic guaranteeing equal political, economic, social and cultural rights to all including the humblest of citizens. Yet after more than three decades of independence and assumption of absolute power by popular leaders, India is nowhere near the goal.

Those great men and women who had solemnly declared that once the "evil-intentioned" British imperialism was vanquished, construction of India as a social democracy and upliftment of economically and culturally exploited millions would not pose a difficult problem.

The developments which have been witnessed in independent India hardly inspire the confidence that the pledges made by the leaders are going to be fulfilled in a foreseeable future or that the government of the country has come into capable hands.

What makes the building of democratic society in India —our cherished objective for nearly a century—to be such an arduous job ?

Admittedly, social engineering is an uphill task; many problems confronting the country are baffling and beyond the capacity of an individual, group or party, however resourceful, to successfully handle them unless fullest and unstinted cooperation is forthcoming from all classes of people in the country. The intelligently designed plans and carefully implemented

projects to generate the required spirit of cooperation over past years has proved abortive. It is time that earnest thought is given and attention paid to discover the reasons for this failure.

The lack of spirit of cooperation is not a political problem but, sadly enough, politicians and administrators have so far treated it only as such. The fact, however, is that the roots of the apathy and indifference to one's wretched condition lie deep in backward Indian culture. Generally speaking, our people, illiterate or educated, possess medieval outlook on life; their mode of thinking is deeply religious. An average Indian believes that every event, occurrence and happening is preordained. Such an attitude spontaneously discards mutual cooperation and spurns self-help which were inculcated in the West by growth of science in the wake of European Renaissance and Enlightenment. Therefore, to engender self-confidence and zest for life among Indians it is imperative that their thinking must undergo a complete change; they must give up the medieval outlook and believe that nothing is determined before hand and that they can and have to shape their own destiny; for this purpose they must take the path of mutual assistance and cooperation.

It has been a most unfortunate feature of India's struggle for freedom against British rule that those who led the movement, at any rate in its final phase (1917-1947), were dominated by archaic and obsolete values of ancient Indian culture which had been renounced by the Buddhist revolution, and were also antagonistic to the spirit of modern scientific age.

Indian culture is composed of several constituents: *vedic, upanishadic, lokayata* (materialistic), *rationalistic, Buddhistic, neo-Brahminic, pauranic, Islamic, Christian, scientific* and *democratic*. Nothing inherited from different periods in the long past has been totally erased; every cultural strand survives in small or big ratio, in Indian character. Part of the conglomerate culture is in consonance with the values espoused by Western scientific thought. Other parts are, however, opposed to such values. What the leaders in possession of

political, literary and social fields in contemporary times, believe and preach to be the genuine and only culture of India is sacerdotalism as contained in the holy scriptures of Brahmins. Its main pillars are unjust four-tier caste system, untouchability, denial of freedom to women, karma theory, *sansara* (cycle of births), transmigration of soul, reward and punishment for acts done in previous births, unknowable supernatural power which forges individual and national destinies and helplessness of humans before fate. The more faith an individual reposes in these doctrines and dogmas the more spiritual he is accepted to be. The progressive aspect of the Indian culture is generally ignored and, indeed, denied to have ever existed.

At the rise of Buddhism in the fifth century B.C., Indian society arrived at the first crossroads when it was faced with the problem whether it should go on the beaten track shown by earliest Brahmins and pursued till then, or follow the path shown by Gautma the Buddha. The Vedic culture was primitive, partly natural but mostly outcome of ignorance. With acquirement of some knowledge it had outlived its usefulness. Buddha effectively opposed it and shook the antique society to its depths compelling Indians to accept new values or perish. Whether Buddha was an atheist or agnostic in his beliefs, he certainly blazed a new trail transcending the ecclesiastical system founded by the Vedas which he repudiated. With the acceptance of new values embodied in Buddha's *Four Noble Truths* and *Eightfold Path*, India passed the crossroads and went ahead.

Buddhism flourished in India roughly for a thousand years (500 B.C.-500 A.D.) and this was a glorious period in the country's history when unparalleled progress was achieved in different fields of human activity. Unfortunately, the prosperous era came to a close by a counter-revolution when neo-Brahminism raised its ugly head under the Gupta rule in fourth century A.D. and ushered in a long dark age.

During this dismal period, India was invaded by one foreign adventurer after another and for fifteen hundred years groaned under subjugation of Turks, Mughals and Pathans,

wallowing in ignorance and infested by social evils. The British adventurers conquered the country in the eighteenth century and dominated over it for nearly two hundred years exploiting its vast economic resources and its man-power as all foreign masters had done before them. But there was also a redeeming feature in the British imperialist rule; it introduced new learning, science, modern ideas and conception of equality, pioneered industrialization, established democratic institutions and a system of incorruptible and efficient administration.

After the termination of British domination, India stands a second time at the crossroads. Should we pursue the path indicated by the backward-looking leadership or the one that has been blazed by science and technology ? Should we continue to adhere to the superstitions, dogmas, traditions and beliefs which caused our degeneration or own abiding human values which were in a seminal form already present in our composite culture and were freshly introduced and popularised by the British ? That is the crucial question on the answer to which depends the fate and future of Indian people.

The leaders who successfully fought British rule have not risen to the high expectation of the people after independence in their new role of guiding the nation in right direction. Torn by opposing ideas about civilization and culture, they have fumbled and misdirected national activities.

On the one hand, in the name of ancient culture, the Indian leaders inculcate superstitious beliefs and irrational doctrines no longer valid, on the other they support new learning, science and technology which were promoted for over one hundred years under British colonial rule. Therefore, confusion prevails in the mind of an average Indian and his self-confidence is lost; there is lack of the spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance, and progress inevitably slows down.

Whether any nation in the East likes it or not, the rationalist-scientific culture which sprang up and flourished in the West after Renaissance and Enlightenment is becoming global; one country after another is gradually coming under its sway. India has not remained uninfluenced by it and despite the strident and persistent protests of the obscurantists, Indians

are increasingly adopting modes of life which are in accord with modern civilisation. And this is as it should be.

It is, however, deplorable that with the plea of preserving the so-called indigenous cultural heritage obstacles are placed in the growth of modern civilization in India and its pace slowed down. Surely, what is inevitable cannot be stopped. But if Indian rulers read the writing on the wall they should cease strengthening obscurantism, and consciouly bend their energy to promote rationalist-scientific culture without reservations; India would then achieve her destiny sooner than later.

The Congress Party ruled the country for thirty years only to end by imposing emergency, establishing authoritarianism and by perpetrating unheard of atrocities to maintain itself in power.

The totalitarian rule was replaced by Janata Government when in March, 1977, Indira Gandhi was trounced at the polls and four opposition political bodies joined hands and captured the administration. The change was acclaimed as a revolution through ballot-box and achievement of India's second freedom. Great expectations were roused that a new era had dawned and hopes of the long-neglected humble classes would be fulfilled.

It goes to the credit of Janata that the anti-people measures adopted by the Congress to abridge liberty have been revoked and civil liberties mostly restored; but so far as the problems faced by the downtrodden are concerned there has been no amelioration.

The Janata Party enjoyed a great popularity when it came to power. But a little later its popularity began to wane. When in June, 1977, only three months after the Party's great triumph, elections were held in northern states the decline in the percentage of votes was notable. In Haryana it fell from 70.35 per cent (in the Lok Sabha Poll) to 46.70 per cent of the votes cast; in Uttar Pradesh, it fell from 68.08 per cent to 48.36 per cent; in Delhi, from 68.15 per cent to 52.58 per cent; in Bihar, from 64.94 per cent to 42.78 per cent; in Rajasthan, from 65.21 per cent to 50.41 per cent; in

Madhya Pradesh, from 57.90 per cent to 47.28 per cent; in Himachal Pradesh, from 57.19 per cent to 49.01 per cent; and in Orissa, from 51.77 per cent to 49.24 per cent. It needs to be stated that these were the states deadly opposed to the Congress Government of Indira Gandhi and brought about her downfall.

Hardly had the Janata leaders governed for two years when the conditions which compelled Indira Gandhi to adopt draconian measures to administer India began to reappear : disorder in the universities, unrest among students; lawlessness, thefts, burglaries, arson and lootings; *hartalas* in different industries, educational institutions, hospitals, banks and offices not infrequently accompanied by violence; resort to satyagraha by those nursing grievances, real or imaginary, police lathi charges, bursting of tear gas shells and firings.

Massacre of untouchables and destruction of their homes have become more frequent now than under the Congress rule; official statistics show communal riots have increased in number. In Aligarh Hindu-dominated Provincial Armed Constabulary assumed notoriety because it assisted RSS fanatics in oppressing Muslims.

The law and order situation has deteriorated; kidnappings of children, robberies and dacoities on highways and trains, assassination of peaceful citizens and eve-teasing and molestation have become almost daily occurrences. S.D. Patil, Union Minister of State for Home, told the Rajya Sabha on February 22, 1979, that incidence of kindnapping in Delhi almost doubled from 328 in 1976 to 649 in 1978, the number for 1977 was 471. The figures for dacoity and robbery, he stated, rose from 3 and 142 in 1976 to 70 and 667 in 1978 respectively. The number of murders committed in 1976, 1977 and 1978 was 120, 184 and 182 respectively. Common men and women feel they are insecure and administration is helpless to save them from the attacks of anti-social elements.

It will be no surprise if Janata, too, eventually finds remedy in adopting drastic measures like emergency though in some different form. Already the Janata Government which

assured the nation that no citizen will be imprisoned without proper trial in a court of law has advised the state governments to put preventive detention acts on the statute book and some of them have done so. Madhya Pradesh and Kashmir have adopted Acts which are not much different from the hated MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act) promulgated by Indira Gandhi—the blackest piece of legislation empowering the executive to arrest and indefinitely detain a person without even furnishing him with the grounds why he has been deprived of his liberty.

Since Janata Party came to power, notwithstanding its professions and protests, on fundamental issues, it has been gradually drawn to follow in the footsteps of its predecessor governments. There is hardly any field of activity—political, social, economic or cultural—in which Janata rulers have displayed any remarkable originality in their initiative. Indeed, if anything, the policies of the new masters of India are characterised by more rigid orthodoxy and closeness of mind, emphasis on total prohibition and countrywide ban on cow slaughter are examples in evidence.

Hindi fanatics have received a new shot in the arm to mount an attack on English language and its use in officialdom. It has scared people in the South who have raised loud protests against the linguistic arrogance. On February 23, 1979, Tamil leaders stoutly condemned in the Rajya Sabha "the deliberate efforts to thrust Hindi in Union Government offices, nationalized banks and public sector undertakings".

If people have lost faith in the Janata Party as they previously did in the Congress who dare say they are not justified. Even those well known Janata leaders who rendered big sacrifices and heavily suffered in bringing the Party to power are today critical, even condemnatory, of the leadership for its impotency and inefficiency to rule and fulfil the pledges given in the manifesto on the basis of which they fought the elections in March 1977. No surprise, large numbers previously drawn to the ruling party have been reconverted and successfully persuaded to return to the Congress (I) fold. It has enabled the despised Mrs. Gandhi to

challenge Janata and start preparations to recapture the government. She has regained part of the charisma which appeared to have vanished after her fall.

The two elements in Indian culture—one dictatorial and authoritarian and the other liberal and democratic—are ever present in the character of the people. The crucial question which needs to be answered today is what is going to dominate Indian life in future. To affirm that the country is now permanently on path of democracy is a grave mistake.

Democracy has not struck roots in Indian soil; only with the fall of Indira Gandhi, the country has been afforded an opportunity to be cautious and remember the lurking danger of dictatorship which is inherent in that aspect of the Indian culture vociferously extolled by the national leaders.

The deafening propaganda carried by the Janata and on the Congress to hoodwink people, creates the impression in the public mind here and abroad that the two parties espouse ideologies which are basically dissimilar; that they have different approaches to life and different policies and programmes for running the administration and solving the innumerable problems confronting the nation. This is far from being correct. The truth is that the same social philosophy guides both; they are the chips of the same block. But the people are so gullible that the real nature of either party is quickly forgotten and hopes are pinned on the fraudulent statements of the leaders. Obviously it is the result of state of helplessness of the people for which one of the main reason is the absence of an alternative party *qualitatively* different from the existing two. An organized democratic body has yet to rise in India.

We are being told that Gandhian philosophy is progressive revolutionary and perfect: only its practitioner who came to power have gone astray, distorted it or have been insincere and dishonest. At every turn of India's condition for the worse, Gandhian stalwarts outside the Establishment come forward claiming that they are truer and more loyal disciples of the Mahatma and therefore more competent to put his theories to practice and save India from going to pieces.

Mahatma Gandhi entertained primitive, hazy, sentimental and eccentric ideas about economics in general and Indian economy in particular. His notions on social and moral issues were archaic and unacceptable to a modern mind. He could not evolve any scientific theories about the solution of national problems confronting the country after independence. Thereafter, after his death his disciples, wading through his voluminous writings and sayings, could not derive any inspiration for their guidance.

Since, however, the Mahatma's name continues to invoke tremendous respect and deep affection in the mass mind, power-hungry politicians, hack-writers and pseudo-intellectuals burn midnight oil to extract plausible economic and social theories through their own interpretation of the great man's statements as suit their interests. Such gimmicks have neither succeeded to improve the lot of the havenots under the Congress regime nor is there any chance that they can prove fruitful while the Janata Party is in power.

It is too late in the day to accept frivolous pleas. Sufficient evidence has accumulated to prove that it is not the practitioners of Gandhism who are solely to blame for the sorry state which has been created but the philosophy of the Mahatma itself which is causing the ruin of the country. If there has occured allround degeneration under the rule of the best exponents of Gandhism why should we hesitate to challenge the merits of the philosophy and discard it when found defective?

The most disgraceful fall in Gandhian ranks has been in the domain of morals and, if we care to recollect, it was the nobility of character which the disciples of the Mahatma claimed to be their greatest asset. As we know to our cost under the rule of the Gandhian masters corruption, nepotism, lawlessness, hooliganism and violence have assumed dimensions unprecedented in the last two centuries. The dirty linen washed in public by self-righteous and obstinate Morarji Desai and scheming Charan Singh, both distingished Gandhians, is the latest example of the moral fall.

Indian politicians of all shades of opinion asseverate

that Hindus have always upheld egalitarian principles and sovereignty of the individual. This is not borne out by historical facts. The bitter truth is that dirctatorship and authoritarianism are inherent in what the nationalists extol as ancient Indian culture. The cardinal doctrine of this culture frequently stated in holy texts is epitomized by the *Bhagavad-Gita* in two couplets in which the Blessed Lord says : "Whenever, there is decay of dharma (justice) and rise of adharma (injustice), then I embody myself, O, Bharata: for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of dharma I am born from age to age" (BG IV, 7-8). Such teachings dinned into their ears during past 1500 years have emasculated the Indians and deprived them of individual sovereignty and self-reliance. They helplessly wait for a superman to emerge and rid them of hardship, miseries and sufferings. It is not without significance that these two couplets of the *Bhagavad Gita* are very popular among Hindus and are frequently quoted by politicians and savants, demagogues and scholars, to prove that the Almighty has been particularly kind and generous to the Indian society by giving them a pledge which no other race or nation can boast of.

Not for nothing did Indira Gandhi assume to be an avatar and, as a matter of fact, she was accepted as an incarnation of goddess Durga and shown by artists riding a tiger during the emergency regime.

This is not all. The Blessed Lord has also asserted that "whoever is powerful know him to have sprung from a spark of my splendour" (BG X, 41). No condition is attached that the authority of the powerful should have been acquired through virtuous deeds and moral means. Thus any desperado, brigand, bandit, villian or cut-throat who succeeds in terrorising a people into submission is blessed with divine grace under sacerdotal Hindu culture. Is this not fascism? Conscious of this cultural background, Indira Gandhi unabashedly says that India cannot be ruled without emergency laws and a dictatorial rod. And millions of Indians heartily respond to her call. It is not a penomenon to be

underestimated or sarcastically brushed aside.

The popularity of the doctrine of avtarship has made Indian mind very recepive to the claims of dictators in politics and godmen in social life who have mushroomed all over the country. It is, therefore, futile to denounce the imposters whether in political, social or religious field, if at the same time the theory of avtarship is not rejected and up-rooted from the minds of Indins.

Indian politics during the post-independence era has been monopolised by strong-arm men; only a leader with a band of goondas at his command can hold his own and the eye of the people or participate in elections at any level with expectation of success. Equipped with hooligan power an individual or a group can also extort money from rich businessmen and thriving capitalist or landlords. Honest, decent and conscientious public men or sincere patriots have no place in active political field. Any man or woman of principle who enters political life should be prepared to be an opportunist, practice hypocrisy, pocket insults and say good-bye to his conscience.

Significantly, Indira Gandhi and her followers are today resorting to the same policy and committing the same mis-deeds—incitement to violence, defiance of law, undermining of Constitution, lowering the prestige of Parliament through rowdyism etc—with which she had been repeatedly charging her opponents and advancing it as the cause which compelled her to impose emergency.

However, it is not fair to blame politicians alone for the decline of whatever democratic spirit or morality was in existence at the time of independence. Let us frankly admit that in our cultural inheritance moral values and democratic fibres are weak while authoritarian and dictatorial elements are assertive, pervading and substantial. Those who wield any influence in the society politican, teacher, lawyer, sage, scholar, scientist, doctor—eulogises the merits of authoritarian part of the heritage though at the same time they may pay lip service to democracy. Has not the number of people rapidly increased in last few months who have become

admirers of emergency ?

The question will be asked : what then is to be done to get the country out of the quagmire into which it has fallen ? If my line of argument is accepted as correct the answer is not difficult to give.

One significant point which usually escapes notice but is of importance for analysing the disconcerting situation in which we find ourselves is that, without exception, all political leaders whether they belong to the Congress or the Janata swear allegiance to Mahatma Gandhi and acclaim his philosophy of life. Even those who till the other day denounced the Mahatma on several grounds (and connived at his assassination) have suddenly become his devotees and admirers of his political, cultural and economic theories. Each one of the leaders may have his own interpretation of what Gandhi stood for and what opinions he held, but if there is an iota of sincerity in their declarations they now support his ideals and outlook on life. What are the implications of this unanimity about the Gandhian approach ?

First and foremost, it has to be understood that *ipso facto* the Congress and the Janata do not stand for two different ideologies; they belong to the same spiritual and intellectual family; they are members of the same brotherhood. What we witness is not a clash of principles; it is not a fight between dictatorship and democracy as Janata leaders are not tired of stressing nor between democracy and anarchy as Indira Gandhi and her followers assert. All said and done, it is a family dispute of the two factions of Gandhians over the issue as to which of them is entitled to hold the citadel of power.

Equally clear should be the conclusion that both parties having failed to give a good account of themselves, it is permissible to presume that all potentialities of Gandhism have been exhausted by the disciples of the Mahatma and found unproductive and anti-progressive. A tree is known by its fruits. If the inefficiency, mediocrity, corruption, dishonesty and immorality indulged in by the Congress and Janata rulers are any indication, Gandhism stands exposed as a

negative philosophy unsuited for upliftment of the fallen Indian society.

It is this philosophy which has shackled the Indian multitudes because though applicable in ancient and medieval times, it is no longer relevant or valid. Most of the ills from which the Indian society suffers are born of it. To march ahead Indians have to shatter the mentality born of this philosophy.

On the one hand the national leaders desire to modernise Indian society but on the other they are attached to medieval values of life. That creates the Indian dilemma. And in their bewilderment the people have got stuck up at the crossroads. It is time that men with vision, farsight and courage realize that if we have to come abreast with the time and be ranked among the developed nations of the world there can be no alternative to the acceptance of rationalistic-scientific way of life. Our most important task is to change the archaic outlook of the people.

Mahatma Gandhi accomplished a historic task. This is not the place to describe how he succeeded in it with his medieval ideas. I have comprehensively dealt with it elsewhere.[1] But why should we drag his philosophy into our affairs when our experience tells us that it is no longer sound for the new task history has set for us. The pillars of ancient ecclesiastical culture have to be pulled down not reluctantly under compulsion but consciously because they stand in the way of our progress. Why should it be done grudgingly and fraudulently to dupe our ignorant countrymen in order to secure their vote at the polls. Let us do it boldly and with full awarness in order to reach our cherished goal—faster and earlier.

The aged leaders who have been born and brought up in the Gandhi Era of Indian history do not possess the courage to usher in a new age of advancement. They shall

[1] *The Role of Bhagavad-Gita in Indian History*, (Sterling, New Delhi); see chapters 35, 36, 37, on "Triumph of Hindu Nationalism", PP. 500-564.

have to step aside or be swept off and make room for young men and women fired with the spirit of renaissance, and imbued with zeal and valour to intelligently guide the nation, remove the dilemma and pass the crossroads. The period of rowdyism and lawlessness should end and honest, moral and sincere men should come out of self-imposed seclusion to raise the standard of public life to a decent level.

This book dealing with post-independence events and developments aims at describing the nature of the social revolution direly needed, the way it is being vigorously suppressed from bursting forth and how its outbreak alone can change the fate of brutalised, downtrodden and disinherited masses of this hapless country. It is a complementary volume to my earlier publication, *the Role of Bhagavad-Gita in Indian History.*

Some portions of this book have been taken in an abridged form from the chapters dealing with post-independence Indian politics in the first edition of *the Role of Bhagavad-Gita in Indian History* but are being deleted in the second edition.

Most of this preface has appeared in the *Caravan* (New Delhi) as an article authored by me and I have to thank the editor of the magazine for allowing me to include it in this book.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Concept of Ram Rajya

For nearly fifteen centuries before the advent of British Imperialism, India was divided into a large number of kingdoms, big and small, ruled without exception by unbridled autocrats whose word was law. There was no individual liberty worth the name, no civil rights for common people and no justice as we know it today. The British not only united, for the first time in history, the entire Indian subcontinent under one central authority, gave it civil and criminal codes which equally applied to all, and established law and order but also spread enlightenment, introduced science and technology, set up industries and built self-governing institutions on western model, thus laying foundations for a democratic state.

Owing to mass illiteracy, colossal ignorance and abysmal poverty the large majority of Indians could not appreciate the new values of life though the tyrannised multitudes had nothing but praise for the peace and orderly government which they had not enjoyed for centuries.

With the termination of the British rule the big question which has been exercising the minds of Indian leadership is : Should the political structure, founded by the British, be allowed to continue or be replaced by some other setup suited to the "genius" of the people. Even after three decades of independence it would not be correct to say that we have arrived at any clear decision in this respect. There is a small percentage of the educated classes which vigorously upholds the notions of civil rights, individual liberty, free thought, liberal outlook and human brotherhood as well as the democratic spirit generated during the past two centuries. But it would be courting self-deception to claim that, by and large, Indians

are champions of equality and eager to maintain democratic institutions. In fact, it would be nearer the truth to affirm that the self-governing institutions are withering away with passage of time and side by side the democratic spirit too is disappearing. The carcass of democracy is being dragged along by self-seeking politicians to preserve their own interests, to throw dust in the eyes of teeming, toiling millions in order to secure their votes when polls are held from time to time and to capture power.

For thirty years Mahatma Gandhi gave direction to India's political life and set it in a particular mould. He was an ardent devotee of Sri Ram who is adored by Hindus as an incarnation of God Vishnu. The Mahatma popularized a song in praise of the god in human form : *Raghupati Ragav Raja Ram, Patit Pavan Sita Ram.* It is believed that the last words Gandhi uttered when he fell to an assassin's bullet, were *Hay Ram.* These two words are permanently inscribed with flowers at the spot where Gandhi's mortal remains were cremated at Raj Ghat.

According to the *Bhagavad-Gita,* the most venerated Hindu scripture, God descends on the earth from age to age to protect the good, to destroy the wicked and to restore righteousness in the world. Sri Ram was born in a royal house at Ajodhia for the same purpose. The holy texts asseverate that of all the divine incarnations he was perfect in every respect—an obedient son, an affectionate brother, a faithful husband, a truthful person, a straight forward man and a just ruler. From ancient times this belief gave currency among the Hindus to the concept of Ram Rajya as an ideal state in which there existed brotherhood of man, no class differences, no sex distinctions, no poverty, no scarcity, no disease and all people were treated equal and lived happily without fear or jealousy.

Whether such a utopia ever existed in reality or was a figment of somebody's imagination to delude millions living in wretchedness and squalor, famished and suppressed, may be considered as one of the unsolved mysteries of Indian history. But Gandhi entertained no doubt about its existence. During

India's freedom struggle and more so after achievement of independence in 1947, Gandhi frequently referred to Ram Rajya as the ultimate goal of Indian society. Jawaharlal Nehru has said : "Many eminent social reformers came before him and succeeded in bringing about some minor changes or in building up a new sect, but Gandhiji, talking in terms of Ram Rajya, brought revolutions to millions of homes without people realizing fully what was happening."[1] However, Gandhi did not spell out the concept and left it conveniently vague thereby fortifying the popular impression that establishment of Ram Rajya would fulfil the aspirations and yearnings of deprived, disinherited and downtrodden classes of Indian society; it would be, in his opinion, superior to any other social system devised by man and known to humanity in historical age; in any case, it would, in his estimation, excel the democratic system evolved by philosophers and scientists in the West since Magna Charta was forced from King John of England after a revolt against him in 1215 A.D.

Going through the seventy odd volumes of the published works of the Mahatma, one can find numerous allusions to Ram Rajya but no precise connotation of the concept, no unambiguous definition and no elucidation for guidance of those now engaged in building free India. For lack of such material it is not easy for a student or a researcher to accept unsubstantiated theories about Ram Rajya adumbrated by the disciples of the Mahatma. Usually, a Gandhian reads between the lines of the Master's writings which unfortunately are often inconsistent on this particular subject, and offers his own interpretation. It has given rise to various concepts of the ideal state and created a virtual babel.

An objective analyst has therefore to tap available literary sources and drawing on them, raise a concrete structure of Ram Rajya as it could possibly have been, as also try to ascertain what revolved in Gandhi's mind about it.

It would be too cumbersome a task, and not much fruitful

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[1] *India : Today and Tomorrow*, Indian Council For Cultural Relations (1959) p. 6.

either, to collect bits here and there from the writings and utterances of Gandhi to form a clear idea of Ram Rajya. We shall therefore confine our study to relevant information available on the subject. The two main sources from which the requisite material can be obtained are the *Ramayana* and the *Hind Swaraj*.

There are two Ramayanas both in verse, one composed by Valmiki in Sanskrit and supposed to have been produced, even before Ram was born, in sixth century B.C., and the other called *Ramcharitmanas* by Goswami Tulsidas (1554-1607 A.D.) in Hindi. Both essentially narrate the same story.

The Ramayana is a holy book and is held in high esteem by the Hindus; it is full of anecdotes and episodes some of which are entertaining and even enlightening. Mahatma Gandhi was a greater admirer of *Ramcharitmanas* probably due to the overwhelming *bhakti* sentiment which pervades the poem. It is most likely that his concept of Ram Rajya was derived more from it than from Valmiki's poem. For he has repeatedly stated that from the entire range of Hindu religious literature the two lores which deeply influenced his life were the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Ramcharitmanas* which reflect the core of ancient Indian philosophy and culture.

Gandhi's views must have been reinforced by Tulsidas' artless description of Ram Rajya in the last canto of his poem, which runs as follows :

"Everyone is devoted to Sri Ram.[1]

"Nobody dies in young age; nobody suffers from any pain. Everyone's body is beautiful and afflicted by no sickness. No one is poor or miserable; none is dependent or foolish or without good qualities.[2]

"All are without hypocrisy, devoted to duty and virtues. Both men and women are shrewd and posses good qualities. All admire virtuous men, scholars and enlightened. All are grateful and no one plays frauds.[3]

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[1] *Ramcharitmanas*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, Uttarkand 20-1.
[2] *Ibid.*, 20-3.
[3] *Ibid.*, 20-4.

"In Ram Rajya all sentient and non-sentient beings are above the consequences of Time, Action and Nature.[1]

"The prosperity and affluence under Ram Rajya cannot be described even by Saraswati (goddess of learning).[2]

"All men and women are generous and are humble servants of Brahmins.[3]

"In Ram Rajya no one commits sins, so there is no need to use rod to punish; the environments are congenial and favourable; therefore there is no need to divide and rule the people.[4]

"In forests trees grow and blossom; elephants and lions live together and birds and animals, forgetting enmity, live with love.[5]

"Birds sing melodius songs; herds of animals roam about fearlessly; they enjoy fragrant, fresh and mild air.[6]

"Creepers and trees offer coveted honey; cows give desired milk, the earth grows abundant needs (of society).[7]

"Considering Ram as the lord of universe, the mountains disgorge jewels; all rivers flow excellent, cold, clear and sweet waters.[8]

"Sea throws up precious stones on its bank for (the use and enjoyment of) humans; all ponds are full of lotuses; all parts of the land are prosperous and its people happy.[9]

"In Ram Rajya the moon by its nectar-like rays perfects the earth. The sun throws rays which are soft as needed and clouds pour only as much water as is required.[10]

"Sri Ramchanderji performed crores of *ashvamedas* (horse sacrifices) and gave many gifts to Brahmins. He is the supporter of the Vedic traditions and upholder of the ancient dharma."[11]

A fantastic conception of Ram Rajya, it is the brain-child of a well meaning, innocent poet. It seems to have fired the imagination of Mahatma Gandhi and enthused him for propagation of the ancient Hindu ideal. He recommended it to the Indians without pondering whether or not it was realistic or could be implemented by any means.

Nevertheless, this ideal of Ram Rajya has to be scrutinized in the light of the doctrines enunciated by Goswami

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1 *Ibid.*, 21.
2 *Ibid.*, 21-3.
3 *Ibid.*, 21-4.
4 *Ibid.*, 22.
5 *Ibid.*, 22-1.
6 *Ibid.*, 22-2.
7 *Ibid.*, 22-3.
8 *Ibid.*, 22-4.
9 *Ibid.*, 22-5.
10 *Ibid.*, 23.
11 *Ibid.*, 23-1.

Tulsidas himself in *Ramcharitmanas* and accepted by him as unexceptionable. Because Gandhi has excessively praised the long poem and, in fact, recommended it as a never-failing guide like the *Bhagavad-Gita*, it is permissible to conclude that he was generally in agreement with Poet Tulsidas' observations and assertions.

As a historical document describing the social system obtaining in Sri Ram's time, *Ramcharitmanas* is invaluable. It tells us about the values, traditions, dogmas, rituals, rites, practices, superstitions and myths prevalent in the ancient and medieval times. It takes for granted the existence of unequal *varnashrama* (four-tier caste system) with multitudes of low, mean, stupid and untouchable human beings; *sansara* (cycle of rebirths) and *karma* theory through which individuals are rewarded and punished for deeds performed by them in their supposed previous births and, as a consequence, their helplessness before fate.

Ramcharitmanas is a supporter of autocratic, authoritarian and dictatorial rule in which the ruler transcends humanity which exists merely to make him happy; it instructs the people to docilely bow before his *firmans*, right or wrong.

Next to the despotic monarch came the Brahmins and cows; in fact from cover to cover of *Ramcharitmanas* it is the Brahmins and cows and to a lesser extent the ruling classes who are given importance and honoured place as the following quotations will witness:

> "Brahmins cannot be subdued by force"[1]
> "Pay Brahmins liberally and bountifully; feed them and worship them."[2]
> "The curse of a Brahmin is very terrible; its consequences cannot be evaded".[3]
> "The Brahmins should be highly paid for performing religious rites"[4]

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[1] *Ibid.*, Balkand 164-1,2,3.
[2] *Ibid.*, 168.
[3] *Ibid.*, 178.
[4] *Ibid.*, 193.

"Seeking welfare of Brahmins and cows may you, o gods, be blessed.[1]

"The easiest way to liberation is that one must have extreme love for the feet of Brahmins and in accordance with the teachings of the Vedas one must be engaged in performance of caste duties."[2]

Sri Ram says :

"Those who hate Brahmins are not liked by me. Brahma, Shiva and other gods who are under their influence loyally worship Brahmins. A Brahmin is worshipful even when he curses, kills and speaks harsh words"[3].

"There is only one good deed (worth doing) in this world; nothing else can be compared with it; it is to worship the feet of Brahmins, rishis and saints; the gods are pleased with it".[4]

"Service of dwija (twice-born) pleases God. Don't dishonour a Brahmin; know him to be equal to God."[5]

"One who abuses Brahmins lives in many hells and after that is born as a crow."[6]

In contrast to the exalted position of Brahmins and to a lesser extent of other *dwijas* the poet approvingly describes as natural the miserable condition of downtrodden, toiling masses, disinherited classes and the crippled. "One-eyed, lame, hench-backed should be known as bad characters; among them women and particularly servant class (should be reckoned as such).[7] "Low caste men are lethargic, unintelligent, mean and outside the pale of society and the Vedas".[8]

One low caste man is made to admit: "We are theives, insensible, violent, unintelligent, untruthful, mean, wrong-doers and without character".[9] "Even a virtuous and enlightened Shudra is not worthy of respect."[10]

Changes in social conditions which were taking place with passage of time became outrageous to Tulsidas. He lamented : "Shudras give lessons on higher knowledge to Brahmins

1 *Ibid.*, 284-1.
2 *Ibid.*, Arnyakand, 15-3.
3 *Ibid.*, 32, 33.
4 *Ibid.*, Uttarkand, 44-4.
5 *Ibid.*, 120-12.
6 *Ibid.*, Ajudhja Kand, 14.
7 *Ibid.*, 145-1
8 *Ibid.*, 250-2.
9 *Ibid.*, Aranyakand, 33-1.
10 *Ibid.*, Uttarkand, 98-1.

and wear sacred thread as well as receive undeserved gifts.[1]

"Shudras discuss (religious) matters with Brahmins and tell them we are no less than you. He who knows Brahma is an excellent Brahmin (be he even born Shudra). So saying, Shudra looks at the Brahmin with fierce eyes."[2]

"Teli, Kumar, Chandal, Bhil, Kaul and Kalvar (all of mean and low birth) become sanyasi (holy recluse) at the death of their wives."[3]

"Shudras belonging to different castes practice *jap* (counting of beads), *tap* (austerity) and *vrat* (fasts) and seated on raised platforms deliver talks on Puranas: everyone does as he likes."[4]

The avatarship theory is adumbrated in the first canto of *Ramcharitmanas*;[5] its virtues are enumerated and highly praised till the end of the poem. The avatar is benevolent, kind, merciful and forgiving to those who are fully devoted and loyal to the avatar. They are assured of liberation and even a high status equal to God depending on their intensity of affection and purity of loyalty. The God affirms : "More than enlightened people, I love my servant. He obtains my position. He entertains no other hope. I want to impress upon you (a bhaka) repeatedly that no one is as dear to me as a loyal servant."[6]

Avatar in religion is reflected as a dictator in politics. One who reposes faith in a superhuman being like an avatar in religion cannot honestly reject dictatorship in political life. That would only betray either lack of understanding or inconsistency in thinking.

Ramcharitmanas has drawn a very disparaging but nevertheless a real picture of women in ancient and medieval ages. It is quite manifest from what has been said in the holy poem about their nature, duties, morality, untrustworthiness, obligations to society etc.

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1 *Ibid.*, 99-3.
2 *Ibid.*, 99-5.
3 *Ibid.*, Balkand, 120-3, 4.
4 *Ibid.*, Balkand, 101-2.
5 *Ibid.*, Uttar and, 15-4.
6 *Ibid.*, Uttarkand.

When Parvati was married to Shiv, her father, Himachal, bidding good-bye to her, advised : "O Parvati, you should worship the feet of Shivji. This is the dharma of a woman. For her the husband is the god and there is no other god (for her).[1]

The denigrating remark that "by nature women is stupid and unable to understand"[2] has been made *ad nauseum* in the poem.[3]

After impressing upon Sita to faithfully serve her husband and giving lessons to her on dharma, her mother, conscious of a woman's miserable fate, questioningly deplores "why did Brahma create women ?"[4]

In *Ramcharitmanas* blackening of woman's character has no limits: "Not even God knows the mind of women; they are a source of all frauds, sins and evils."[5] And what is a woman's unpardonable sin in the eyes of saints : "Demand for independence to act on her own."[6]

Ramcharitmanas states : "young women are the root of vice and source of pains and sorrows."[7]

Again, "Woman is impure from her birth. She is purified by service to her husband."[8]

What did Hindus in ancient and medieval times expect of a noble woman : "Forbearance, duty, friend and wife, these four are tested at the time of misfortune. If the husband is old, diseased, witless, blind, deaf, irritable and completely helpless and the wife disregards or disrespects him, she is tortured in various ways in the abode of dead. For women there is only one duty, only one vow and only one principle; to cultivate affection for the feet of her husband, in thought, word and deed. The woman of highest virtue spoken of by

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1 *Ibid.*, Uttarkand, 99.

2 *Ibid.*, Balkand 57.

3 See, for example, Balkand, 50-3, 107, 109-1, Ajudhiakand 12-3, 26-4, 7, 171-4, 202, Aranyakand 44-1, 2, 3, 4.

4 *Ibid.*, Balkand, 333-3, 4.

5 *Ibid.*, Ajudhiakand, 161-2.

6 *Ibid.*, 171-4.

7 *Ibid.*, Aranyakand 44.

8 *Ibid.*, 5-1.

Vedas, Puranas and saints is the one who never forgets her husband and does not even in a dream think of another man."[1]

Discussing the status of women *Ramcharitmanas* does not even once stipulate any reciprocity on behalf of men, no obligation on them to be equally loyal to women in their mutual dealings. Polygamy was common in the ancient and medieval age. Both King Dashrath and King Janak had more wives than one. The practice is applauded and not at all looked down upon; most of the above quoted reproachful remarks are put in the mouths of women. They are made to cheerfully accept the abject, servile and degrading status of slaves and feel glorified in it.

It would appear that in Tulsidas' time some small changes had begun to occur in the attitude of women and he felt angry and despised it. He stubbornly opposed the change and bewailed it in exaggerated tones :

"O Gosain, all men are under the command of their wives who make them dance as a juggler does his monkeys." "Widows wear new dresses and beautify themselves"[2]. It is, therefore, no surprise that when Sri Ram conquered Lanka and rescued Sita, who had been Ravana's prisoner for years, he forced her to undergo a fire ordeal in order to prove her chastity. It is shocking; for being an avatar Sri Ram knew or should have known that she was innocent and sinless. But he could not overcome the sense of male domination and the fear of losing popularity among the religion-ridden, traditionalists of his own class.

With the humiliating condition of women who were considered unbearable burden on parents, the system of dowry flourished as is evidenced by several instances given in the *Ramcharitmanas*. Whether it be the marriage of Parvati with Shivji or Sita with Ram or, for that matter, of any other rich or poor couple, parents of the bride were expected to give

1 *Ibid.*, 4-4,5,6.

2 *Ibid.*, Uttarkand 98-1.

dowry and get rid of the girl; the richer the dowry the better for her; otherwise she may have to undergo torture, and endure taunts and gibes at the in-laws.[1]

When Shivji agreed to accept Parvati as his bride, Himachal, her father, presented a huge dowry to the bridegroom :

> Maid servants, servants, chariots, horses, cows, costly garments, jewels and other valuable goods; foodgrains and golden utensils. All these were put in carriages which are beyond description and given in dowry.[2]

Similarly on Sita's wedding her parents followed the time-honoured custom : "On backs of countless bullocks and shoulders of labourers, King Janak despatched beautiful beds; he also presented one lakh horses, fifty thousand chariots decorated from top to bottom, ten thousand elephants, carriages full of gold, garments and jewels, buffalos, cows, and other goods. Janak gave limitless dowry which is indescribable."[3]

While bidding good-bye to the groom's party, King Janak grasped the feet of King Dashrath and the four princes in token of his inferiority for being the father of the bride who had been generously accepted by the parents of young Ram.[4]

There is not even a hint that King Dashrath reciprocated this gesture of goodwill in a similar manner. Being the father of the bridegroom in a male dominated society why should he do so ? He was not in fact expected to do so; it was inconceivable,

It is not my purpose to write an exhaustive critique of the *Ramcharitmanas* which will require to produce a few volumes; my study is limited and meant only to discover the values which people cherished and held in high esteem in the era when Sri Ram lived. I want to discover what Ram Rajya stands for in order to understand how and in what ways the

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1 *Ibid.*, 98-3.

2 *Ibid.*, Balkand, 100-4.

3 *Ibid.*, Balkand 323-2,3 and 233.

4 *Ibid.*, Balkand.

concept has influenced Indian social life through the past centuries till today.

Astrology and Palmistry were the two avocations which were common and in which all classes particulary the educated and well to do evinced full faith. Brahmin purohits were consulted on all occasions to give advice whether or not any work could be undertaken in view of the findings of the two "sciences". Astrology played a prominent part in the life of an individual; dates of marriages, launching of political, commercial or state adventures, wars, religious rites, travels etc. were fixed after prior consultations with astrologers.[1]

More important and frequently referred to are omens which were either auspicious or inauspicious, but deeply affected the thinking and activities of the people. If omens were inauspicious such as crying of crows and owls, crossing of path by cats or presence of donkeys, vultures and foxes or chance looking at fourth-day moon, it was discouraging and dejecting.[2]

Talismans and amulets were worn to seek protection from evil spirits and contaminating shadow of low caste men[3].

The *Ramcharitmanas* abounds with narration of miracles which people believed to be true; there is no part of the poem where the author does not tell us about them. They are peurile, senseless, bereft of reason and unacceptable to a mature mind or to anyone with an iota of common sense. The miracles described are countless and it is not possible to mention even a fraction of them. To convey an idea of their enormity a few may be stated here:

> In place of one there can be many Sri Rams at the same time.[4]
>
> The two great mountains Sameru and Kailash, can be easily lifted and moved by monkeys like ordinary stones.[5]

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1. *Ibid.*, Balkand, 236, 302-1, 2, 3, 4, 303, 311-3, 312-4. 321-2, 322-4.
2. *Ibid.*, Ajudhiakand 19-3, 156-3, 157-2, 191-3, 192-2, 234, Sunderkand, 34-3, 37-3, Lankakand 13-1, 47-4, 77-5.
3. *Ibid.*, Lankakand 47-4, 77-5, 89-1,2.
4. *Ibid.*, Balkand 200-3.
5. *Ibid*, 291-4.

When Vindyachal mountain grew taller in order to hide the sun, Rishi Agastya stopped its further growth.[1]

While the battle between Ram and Ravan was being fought every one in the army appeared to be by turns Ram or Ravan.[2]

A Rakshasa friend of Ravan transforms himself into a golden deer[3]

Hauman jumps across the sea 80 miles wide. While doing so, Susra obstructs his path and opens her mouth wider and Hanuman becomes physically larger. Ultimately he changes himself into a mosquito and runs away. All this happens while he is jumping over the wide sea.[4]

Monkeys fetch big mountains to construct a bridge across the sea and these do not sink but float on water.[5]

Bharat puts Hanuman and the mountain with Sanjivani herb on his arrow which darts direct from Ajudhia to Lanka.[6]

Ram's arrow directed at a Rakshasa chief sends him one hundred yojans (nearly 200 miles) away.[7]

Sri Ram shoots one lakh of arrows at the Rakshasas in a moment and the arrows return into Ram's quiver.[8]

Ravan's heads and hands are severed by Sri Ram but they grow afresh repeatedly.[9]

King Dashrath long dead, appears on the battlefield in Lanka and kisses his son and blesses him.[10]

Sri Ram returns to Ajudhia in Pushpak viman (airplane) without a pilot and then bids it to return to Kubera with no pilot to fly it.[11]

The *Ramcharitmanas* introduces sages, devatas (gods) celetial beings and others claiming to be above human and natural laws, but they are generally deficient in intelligence and morally lechers. It is digusting to know them resorting to fraud, chicanery, falsehood and underhand means to achieve their objects which are mostly petty and sometimes sordid. Rape, adultery, violence and duplicity do not deter them, if

1 *Ibid.*, Ayudhyakand 269-1
2 *Ibid.*, Arayakand 19-4.
3 *Ibid.*, 24-8
4 *Ibid.*, Sunderkant 1-4.
5 *Ibid.*, 59-1.
6 *Ibid.*, Lankakand 59-3
7 *Ibid.*, Aranyakand 24-3.
8 *Ibid.*, Lankakand 77-2
9 *Ibid.*, 91-6.
10 *Ibid.*, 111-1.
11 *Ibid.*, Uttarkand 4.

they can fulfil their reprehensible ambitions by resorting to them.

"Devata's intlleect is mean, their residence is high," laments Tulsidas, "but their deeds are atrocious; they cannot bear to see the well being of others."[1] Impersonation, jealousy, poisoning, envy, anger and fraud are common practices among them.[2] Sri Ram, the hero of the poem, on whom Saint Tulsidas lavishes fulsome praise is not free from blemishes. He murders King Bali not in an open fight but hiding himself behind a tree and darting a lethal arrow at the innocent victim. Coming to know of the snare employed to kill him, Bali is righteously furious and rebuking Sri Ram mourns : "You have come as an avatar on the earth to defend dharma but have killed me as a hunter. You took me as your enemy and Sugriva as your friend. For what sin of mine did you behave like this ?[3]

Even Ravan taunted Ram for this heinous deed. [4]

Sri Ram is distinguished among the avatars for his perfection and celebrated as *maryada purshottam* (best among the great for maintaining traditions). There is not a single ancient or medieval Hindu tradition which he has transgressed. Again and yet again these traditions are meticulously recorded by Tulsidas.

The Ramayana is one of the most popular scriptures of the Hindus. In North India the *Ramcharitmanas* is devoutly studied. Brahmins widely travel over the country especially in the rural areas, hold big gatherings and recite the poem (known as Katha) to the deep appreciation of the audiences. During Ram Naumi days (birthday celebration of Sri Ram) whole nights are spent over the Katha festival. The poem has thus become the main intellectual, moral and spiritual nourishment of Hindus in India. It is indeliby inscribed in their minds and memories. They conduct their lives according to the lessons learned by reading or hearing the poem. A former

[1] *Ibid.*, Balkand 11-3.
[2] *Ibid.*, 135, 136.
[4] *Ibid.*, Kishkandakand 8-3.
[4] *Ibid.*, Lankakand 89-3.

President of India, V. V. Giri, while in office, launched a gigantic campaign on February 17, 1971, to collect millions of copies of the Ramayana for distribution abroad so that non-Indians may profit by the high ideals taught by the holy took. The task of distribution was entrusted to Indian embassies in different countries. On August 2, 1979, Union Energy Minister K. C. Pant, stressed the need, in a public function, to popularise *the Ramcharitmanas*. He said : "Though so many works had been written the world over, no other was so closely linked with the day to day life of people as *the Ramcharitmanas*." Blissfully unware of the implications of his statement, Pant was uttering unvarnished truth.

When Mahatma Gandhi stressed that India's goal after independence was to establish Ram Rajya, the picture in the average Hindu mind was the one drawn by Goswami Tulsidas in the *Ramcharitmanas*.

The picture of Ram Rajya drawn here is gleaned from the contents of *the Ramayana*. Though Mahatma Gandhi vanerated all religious texts, he cherised unreserved faith throughout his life, as stated earlier, in two scriptures, namely, the *Ramcharitmanas* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Did he then draw inspiration from *the Ramayana* for building an ideal state of his dreams in Independent India ? An answer to this question can be given after we explore what revolved concretely in his mind about the basic principles which he believed should govern the ideal state.

We have not to wade through the tomes in which the Mahatma's writings, statements and speeches have been preserved for the benefit of posterity nor through those hundreds of volumes which have been produced on him by others in this country or abroad. Gandhi published a tiny booklet entitled *Hind Swaraj* providing seminal ideas of his philosophy. It has enabled us to comprehend the essence of the Ram Rajya as conceived by him. Pseudo-intellectuals and wishful thinkers among his followers try to make out by referring to a stray remark here and there in his writings that a lot of change occurred in his thinking during 1930s and

1940s; therefore it is unfair to judge him by what he wrote in *Hind Swaraj*. It may be therefore added that he stubbornly adhered to the views expressed in the booklet till the last days of his life.

In 1938, a widely read journal, *Arya Path*, published a special number on *Hind Swaraj*. Feeling happy at it, Gandhi sent a message for the number in which he said: "I might change the language here and there if I had to rewrite the booklet. But after the stormy thirty years through which I have since passed, I have seen nothing to make me alter the views expounded in it." A new edition of *Hind Swaraj* was published by Navjivan Publishing House in 1944 containing Gandhi's message to *Arya Path* and a preface by Mahadev Desai. Desai quotes Gandhi as saying : "The booklet is severe condemnation of Modern civilization. It was written in 1908. My conviction is deeper (in these ideas) today than ever."

In *the Hind Swaraj*, the Mahatma frankly admits that "religion is dear to me and my first complaint is that India is becoming irreligious" . . . "God gifted man with intellect that he might know the Maker. Man abused it so that he might forget his Maker."[1]

Gandhi's ideas about civilization are notable. He thinks that "under the modern civilization the nations of Europe are becoming degraded and ruined day by day.[2] The "true test of (Western) civilization lies in the fact that people living in it make bodily welfare the object of life."[3] . . . "The civilization is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed . . . It is eating into the vitals of English nation. It must be shunned."[4] "When its (Civilization's) full effect is realised, we shall see that religious superstition (mentioned in *Ramcharitmanas*) is harmless when compared to the modern civilization."[5]

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[1] *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule*, (1961 edition) p. 48.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

The Mahatma asserted:

> In order to restore India to its pristine condition, we have to return to it (Ancient Hindu Civilisation). In our civilisation there will naturally be progress, retrogression, reforms, and reactions; but effort is required, and that is to drive out Western civilisation. All else will follow.[1]

Like Goswami Tulsidas vehemently opposing any change in Indian society, Gandhi says: "In the midst of all this (world changes) India remains immovable and that is her glory. . . . We have managed with the same kind of plough as existed thousands of years ago and "our indigenous education remains the same as before. And where this cursed civilisation has not reached, India remains as it was before."

Significantly, Gandhi adds: "Millions will always remain poor, ... those who want to change conditions such as I have described are enemies of the country and are sinners."[2]

Clinching the issue Gandhi affirmed : "Indian civilisation is the best and the European is the nine days wonder." [3]

Gandhi's views on education are equally remarkable : "The foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us... I do not for a moment believe that my life would have been wasted had I not received higher or lower education. It is we, the English knowing Indians, that have enslaved India. The curse of the Nation will rest not upon the English but upon us.[4] ...We are so much beset by the disease of civilsation that we cannot altogether do without English education.[5] ...We should abandon the pretension of learning many sciences. Religious, that is ethical, education will occupy the first place."[6]

In the *Hindi Swaraj* , Gandhi advocated the destruction of railways, hospitals, law courts and even postal services. This would be, in his opinion. "a consummation to be devoutly wished for." (An ideal Ram Rajya indeed) "But for the

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 93.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 90.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 91.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

railways English could not have such a hold on India as they have. The railways have spread the bubonic plague...Railways have also increased the frequency of famines.. Railways accentuate the evil nature of man."[1] "Hospitals are institutions for propagating sin. Men take less care of their bodies and mortality increases. European doctors are the worst of all."[2] "Sometimes I think that the quacks are better than highly qualified doctors. "[3]

Cheap postal service introduced by the British in India is condemnable because, says Gandhi, "today anyone can abuse his fellows by means of a letter for one penny."[4]

In Gandhi's opinion the Western civilisation depended on machinery and therefore it was the root of all sin. "It is machinery that has impoverished India.[5] .."Machinery has begun to desolate Europe. Ruination is now knocking at the English gates, Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilisation; it represents a great sin."[6]

No doubt, obligingly, Gandhi without prejudice to his views expressed in *the Hind Swaraj*, made, in his old age, remarks from time to time on various subjects to present himself as not hostile to modernism. "I am uncompromisingly against all destructive machinery. But simple tools and instruments and such instruments and machinery as saves individual labour and lightens the burden of the millions of cottagers, I should welcome," and "the heavy machinery for work of public utility which cannot be undertaken by human labour, has its inevitable place."[7]

It provides talking points to Gandhi's defenders. But such statements were rendered meaningless by his repeated denunciation of machinery and industrialisation even in the closing years of his life; as a matter of fact, he adhered basi-

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
2 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
3 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
7 *The Gandhain Alternative of Western Socialism*, by V.K.R.V. Rao, p. 20.

cally to the beliefs clearly stated in *the Hind Swaraj*. "I do not believe that multiplication of wants and machinery contrived to supply them is taking the world a single step nearer its goal. I wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and go to the ends of the earth in search of their satisfaction. If modern civilisation stands for all this and I have understood it to do so, I call it satanic."[1]

Gandhi was opposed to setting up of representative assemblies of people. He held very poor opinion of even British Parliament. He described the Mother of Parliaments in most uncomplimentary terms like "a sterile woman and a prostitute."[2]

Gandhi unreservedly rejected modern values and scientific culture. In the disintegration of Hindu society, he clearly saw the consequences of secular morality. But he was shrewd enough not to openly or unequivocally denounce democracy or secularism for fear of alienating the sympathies of progressive and educated classes in India and abroad. He knew that only by appealing to the justice implicit in these values could he further his own revivalist mission. Only under cover of slogans advocating reason, human freedom, equality and brotherhood of man, the archaic system of religious supremacy could he restored.

As a staunch believer in the theories adumbrated in *the Ramcharitmanas*, the Mahatma reposed faith in a benevolent monarchy which he called Ram Rajya. When Gokhale whom, curiously, Gandhi revered as his guru, read *the Indian Home Rule* as the English version of the *Hind Swaraj* was entitled, he commented that "it was so crude and hastily conceived that the author himself will destroy the book after spending a year in India." This prediction did not come true for Gandhi held firmly that the *Hind Swaraj* contained the essence of his philosophy and the basic ideas that governed his outlook on life.

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[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

[2] *Op. cit.*,

The Hind Swaraj supplements *the Ramcharitmanas* and the two together provide an ample elucidation of the Ram Rajya which, in the opinion of all nationalist leaders, is the real goal of Free India. In the following chapters an attempt has been made to closely examine how Free India endeavouring to concretise the Ram Rajya concept has come under the sinister influence of reaction and counterrevolution leading to the allround crisis in which today the country finds itself over head and ears.

CHAPTER TWO

Light and Darkness

A devotee of superman (avatar) cult, Mahatma Gandhi had little faith in democracy; he was, basically, opposed to parliamentary system of government. It was only to delude liberal classes and democrats in the West, gain their sympathies for India's freedom struggle and secure her liberation from British Imperialism that he, now and then, displayed interest in democracy and occasionally paid tributes to it.

The Mahatma was assassinated by a cruel fanatic only after five months of India's independence. That did not make much difference nor create any insurmountable obstacle in putting the ideal of Ram Rajya into practice. Most stalwarts of the freedom struggle were staunch proponents of Gandhi's philosophy and capable and powerful to direct national life according to it. A few of them, however, laid stress on rationalist-scientific values to lead the country on path of progress.

Independence saw the Gandhian leadership roughly divided into two groups : First, those who held the reins of power in their hands and established governments at the Centre and in the states; second, those who remained outside the power structure and preached the doctrines of the Mahatma in their prestine purity. By the very nature of their position, the ruling elite were compelled to gradually deviate from the Gandhian way of life. If backward, underdeveloped India was to benefit by science and technology and come abreast with advanced nations, the fads and idiosyncrasies of the Mahatma had to be discarded and modernity introduced in all spheres of social life. Coming in touch with the realities no less than with the powerful forces of advancement all over the world, the Congress rulers, responsible for the uplift of 550 million Indians,

soon discovered that reactionary "spiritual" tenets of Gandhi were of little use for achievement of the objective of building a modern state. They could not, however, rise above the hangover of their immediate past and openly renounce Gandhism in order to proceed on the revolutionary path. But they did make efforts to introduce a new era by adopting policies in diverse fields which were progressive in character. It is a pity that the rulers did not have the courage to go the whole hog with the change but only timidly pursued the course which history indicated. They therefore fell between the two stools of scientific liberalism and Gandhian counterrevolution.

In the brief survey made in this and the following chapters I do not presume to shed light on all sides of the indigenous rule which, properly, is the work of a prefessional historian. My specific and limited purpose is to produce facts and figures to show that India's sufferings and miseries stem from the religious mode of thinking popularised by Gandhian nationalists.

Appropriately, Jawaharlal Nehru, political heir of the Mahatma, assumed charge of the administration, as the first Prime Minister of Free India, at the unearthly hour of midnight on August 15, 1947, because Brahmin astrologers had declared that the daytime was inauspicious for doing so. The ceremony was performed with age-old Hindu rituals accompanied by chanting of Vedic mantras and other sacred texts. It was surely not a hopeful start for a secular state which the new rulers professed to establish.

In an atmosphere surcharged with excitement and tension born of the Partition holocausts,Nehru addressed the members of the Constituent Assembly. "At the stroke of the midnight hour," he spoke exultantly, "when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger call of unity". Nehru grandiloquently named the occasion "India's tryst with

destiny."

The jubilation of having achieved independence was marred by widespread communal disturbances and massacres in north and east India. Nehru and his colleagues faced the frightening situation with courage, determination and understanding bringing it under control within a few months. At times, disregarding grave personal risks the Prime Minister broke into the rings of furious Hindu fanatics in Delhi and saved the lives of many helpless Muslims about to be butchered. He became the champion of the minorities who looked up to him for protection, justice and fair treatment in Independent India.

Having suffered political imprisonment for over nine years in the aggregate, Nehru had graduated with flying honours from the school of national distinction. Beloved of the younger generation, favoured lieutenant of Gandhi, he was the patron-saint of secular India. Gandhi's assassination, on January 30, 1948, had made him the sole arbiter of India's destiny. He had the historical opportunity to direct the country on sound lines.

A westerner in outlook, non-communal by conviction and cosmopolitan by nature who disclaimed being Hindu and disliked being called Pandit, Nehru was, on the advent of independence, acceptable to all sections of progressive thinking in India. He possessed a robust and a magnetic personality which charmed, attracted and commanded. But he was peevish, irascible and impatient; worse still, he liked to be surrounded by flatterers, that common weakness of oriental rulers.

Among the voices which beckoned Nehru, now and again, to give up looking backwards and follow the path of progress and Indian renaissance which alone could lead India to its destiny, was one stridently raised by M.N. Roy. Nehru had in his autobiography acknowledged Roy as a giant among intellectuals, but disdained to accept his advice as impracticable.

M.N. Roy was born of Brahmin parents in a Bengal village on March 21, 1887. As a full blooded nationalist while in his teens, he left India during the days of First World

War in search of arms to fight against British Imperialism, but circumstances compelled him to stay abroad for nearly 15 years roaming in different parts of the world. He became a communist and was taken into confidence by Lenin and appointed as a member of the Third International. He worked indefatigably to spread the new faith in Asia and particularly in India. After Lenin's death having fallen out with Russian communist leaders he returned home in 1930 where he was imprisoned for six years for his anti British activity.

Roy wrote over fifty books to explain his philosophy of freedom and his plans for cultural and social emancipation of the Indian people. The burden of his songs is that Indians need a mental change, a philosophical revolution to fight the innumerable political, social and economic problems which beset them. In his view the core of the crisis in modern times is that man has lost faith in himself. "Man has disappeared from the scene of social thought and social engineering. When man is degraded and relegated to such a position naturally he loses confidence in himself." Roy believed that the brutalized Indian society can be uplifted by rational morality and man re-established in his sovereign position.

Soon after his release from imprisonment in 1936, Roy founded the weekly *Independent India* on April 4, 1937, to preach his views. After India attained independence, the name of the journal was changed to *Radical Humanism* and it is now published as a monthly from New Delhi.

Roy joined the Congress in 1937. Gandhi wanted him to discard "the unIndian fads" he had imbibed and accept the Hindu culture on which Indian Nationalism is based. Roy rejected the suggestion outright. He stood firmly on his ground and frequently warned that India was being led on wrong path by Gandhi and his disciples. Needless to add that he was a harsh critic of Ram Rajya ideal.

In contemporary history of India, Roy was the most clear headed of thinkers and an uncompromising rationalist. His utmost stress was on reason. "To begin with, the voice of reason must be raised warning the progressive world against the different varieties of orthodoxy and blind passion which

are creating the atmosphere of stark madness."

So long as British rule lasted Roy's voice was heard and appreciated by very few people. Had he lived longer there can be no doubt he would have by his writings, speeches and work generated an atmosphere for the early growth of true democratic forces in this country. He would have exposed Ram Rajya as a worthless and hollow concept. But unfortunately he died in December 1954 leaving the work to be completed by his followers who stand no comparison to his gigantic intellectual and moral stature.

Roy repeatedly warned Nehru that his political philosophy partly modern and partly medieval would end up in ruining India. The warning went unheeded with the unhappy consequences as we shall discover at the end of this study.

Nehru remained involved in mental confusion caused by different pulls of scientific culture and Brahmin metaphysics till the end of his life. Although a great admirer of social democracy and modern science, he could never rid his mind of the deceptive greatness of India's Brahmin past and, indeed, at times, was frightened by the idea of severing the country's links with the degrading traditions. Thus he continued to hover between his keen desire to promote scientific revolution and anxiety to preserve tradition-bound Hinduism which had suffocated India's soul for fifteen hundred years, deprived the people of social progress and induced them to accept subjugation of foreigners.

Nothing can illustrate Nehru's confusion better than the contradictory statements he made in a paper entitled *India : Today and Tomorrow* which he read before a select gathering of intellectuals on February 22, 1959, after he had ruled over the country for twelve years. "There is no future for us without science and technology", he affirmed. "At the same time that future would be shallow and empty without any real meaning if we ignore or forget our past."[1] "To deny the past and break with it completely is to uproot ourselves and

[1] Jawharlal Nehru, *India : Today and Tomorrow*. Indian Council for Cultural Research, New Delhi (1959), p. 4.

sapless, dry up."[1]

India's past is not uniform. Had Nehru meant by the past that period of Indian history when reason, thirst for knowledge and yearning for social justice were in ascendancy, his plea would have been relevant and justifiable. But his praise of Gandhi and his conception of Ram Rajya show that it was the Brahmin past of which he was solicitous. Obviously, he did not realise that scientific outlook was wholly incompatible with Brahmin ideals; the two ill went together.

Nehru, if he was under any compulsion to derive inspiration from Indian history, had two models, the Mauriyas and the Guptas, before him for guidance. Significantly, he chose the Gupta period which he called the "Golden Age of India" and to which he has paid glowing tributes in eloquent language in *The Discovery of India*. Samudra Gupta, the imperialist, and not Asoka, the humanist, was Nehru's ideal. He said that the age of Guptas was "enlightened, vigorous, highly cultured, and full of vitality... one of its great rulers, Samudra Gupta, has been called the Indian Napoleon".[2]

It is hardly surprising that under the nationalist rule India is witnessing a second "golden age" of a similar variety as the one during the rule of the Guptas: the same efflorescence of dying art and culture, affluence of upper classes, limitless extravagance, building of religious edifices, immorality, corruption and vulgarity of the rich side by side with dire poverty and utter wretchedness of the toiling masses.

In lamenting Nehru's muddle-headedness, it would, however, be unfair to ignore or underrate the good work that he did under inspiration of the European Renaissance which had deeply impressed him and left abiding impressions on Indian mind during the days of the British rule. But for his indecisiveness, Nehru would have risen to the occasion and changed the fate of India. He failed and became a despot. "Nehru never wished to be a tyrant, but he became one—not a great one but a petty one, and not through will but through vacillation."[3]

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1 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
2 *The Discovery of India* p. 118.
3 *The Crisis of India*, p. 308.

Nehru's biggest achievement was that, despite widespread political and communal disturbances, he was able to hold India together, restore law and order and stabilise administration in a few months after the withdrawal of the British. A man of rare sensibility and compassion, he cared much for the victims of the Partition. He felt pained by human suffering.

With surprising and commendable speed, the Constituent Assembly which consisted of those elected to the Central Legislature in the general elections of 1946, drafted a new comprehensive constitution for the country and, in November, 1949, adopted it. The glorious Preamble of the Constitution declared:

> We the people of India have solemnly resolved to constitute into a Sovereign Democratic Republic and to secure to all citizens,
> Justice, social, economic and political,
> Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship,
> Equality of status and of opportunity, and to promote among all
> Fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation,
> hereby adopt, enact and give ourselves this Constitution.

The human values evolved in the three great revolutions of world history—American, French and Russian—are there in a nutshell in this succinct and potential declaration.

Even to announce the grafting of secular democracy on the basically hierarchical caste-ridden Indian society was no small achievement and the main credit for it should go to Jawaharlal Nehru and a few enlightened persons who vigorously supported him. If today India is not a theorcratic state, at any rate in theory, it is due to the endeavours of this dynamic personality who strove, along with a handful of progressives, against heavy odds to modernize India's medieval society.

Taking the 1935 Act as a working model, the new Constitution introduced a federal state with a parliamentary type of democratic government. The Central Legislature or parliament has two houses, the Lok Sabha (lower house) representing the people and the Rajya Sabha (upper house) representing

the states (as the provinces were renamed). The states have their own legislatures with some having also a second chamber where special interests are represented. Whether in the centre or in the states parliamentary responsibility, as in the British system, prevails. Suffrage is universal and every adult person, man and woman, is entitled to vote in both central and state elections.

Some of the features of the new Constitution were notable. The judiciary under the direction of the Supreme Court was independent and free of any influence of the executive or legislature. The fundamental rights of a citizen had been clearly defined and declared inviolable; among others they included complete freedom of expression and right to form associations; caste distinctions had been annulled throughout in the provisions of the Constitution and untouchability had been abolished and its practice in any form forbidden under article 15 (2) and 16 (2).

Part IV of the Constitution contained Directive Principles of State Policy (not enforceable by any court) but clearly stated for guidance of the legislatures, the central and state governments and the Judiciary. Among the directives which deserve particular notice are: (a) that all citizens have the right to an adequate means of livelihood, (b) that operation of economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment, and (c) that equal pay should be given to both men and women for equal work. Article 45 in this part called upon the State to provide within a period of ten years free compulsory education for all children upto the age of 14 years.

These provisions would show that, broadly, the Constitution was built on the political and ethical principles which, unknown to Brahmin civilisation, had been painstakingly fostered by the enlightened British rule. Generally, the spirit that animated the Constitution breathed a Western flavour. It was strikingly opposed to Ram Rajya.

To be able to adopt a comprehensive Constitution dealing with every aspect of social life within a period of barely two years was a significant achievement. But more

remarkable was the holding of first general elections at the end of 1952. For the first time in India's history, every man and woman twenty-one years of age, had a vote in determining the destiny of the nation. The electorate numbered about 176 million, the largest in any country in the world, the majority of them illiterate. There were 90,000 polling stations, 224,000 polling booths and 200 million ballot papers, by any measure stupendous indeed. Any progressive could legitimately feel proud of such an accomplishment.

Did the Congress turn a new leaf and decide to renounce Brahmin ideals and lead the country on path of progress by espousing modern values? One wishes to give the answer in affirmative, but, as subsequent developments have shown, the Constitution was meant to serve as a facade, its makers were following the age-old hypocrisy of the Hindu society as suited the contemporary times. They were maintaining the style to preserve hoary institutions under the umbrella of Republican Constitution. Notwithstanding the opposition of the progressives the revivalists were able to vitally damage the cause of democracy and distort the concept of secularism at several places in the Constitution.

We need not go into all sections of the Constitution to examine it closely. It would be more fruitful to see how it has been made to operate during the past thirty-two years. The framers of the Constitution let the cat of revivalism out of the bag when they designed the new State as "India that is Bharat", a nomenclature which carries a special meaning. India has no savour of religion but Bharat is an ancient legacy with deep roots in the Brahminical past. The conflict between India and Bharat may not be clear in theory, but it is so conspicuous in practice in India of today.

The Congress had in pre-independence days repeatedly declared that Hindustani in both Devanagri and Persian scripts would be the lingua franca of free India because it was more or less understood in all parts of the country. In his weekly *Harijan*, even Gandhi wrote on August 10, 1947:

> The Congress must stand firm as rock. It dare not give way on the question of lingua franca of India. It cannot be Persianised Urdu

or Sanskritised Hindi. It must be a beautiful blend of the two simple in form and written in either script. Let us not turn away, from the Urdu script.

The Constitution, despite strong opposition from various sections of delegates in the Constituent Assembly, made Hindi in Devanagri Script as the national language of India which is Greek to all the non-Hindu minorities as also to the Hindus living in South India. It is well to remember that even after Partition approximately 80 million Muslims continue to live in India, who either speak Urdu or have sentimental ties with the language. Maulana Abul Kalan Azad, veteran leader and a former Congress President, felt upset at the intolerance exhibited in adopting the Hindi Resolution.

Incredible as it may seem, some attempts were made to have Sanskrit as the national language. Dr. K.N. Katju, an eminent nationalist leader who became, by turns, governor, a state chief minister and member of central cabinet, seriously suggested on November 2, 1949 : "Though I do not know Sanskrit I strongly hold the view that it should be made the national language of the country". Chief Justice Patanjali Shastri declared on January 4, 1953: "If only we realise the importance of Sanskrit for maintenance and propagation of our culture both in this country and abroad, it would be a great unifying force. I am one of those who look forward to Sanskrit being made the national language at no distant future."

For many years prior to independence the Congress had two songs—*Bande Matram* of Bankimchandra Chatterji and *Sare Jahan se Achha* of Mohammad Iqbal—as national songs which were sung in public meetings and at national festivals. Unexpectedly, the Constituent Assembly was persuaded to adopt Rabindranath Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana* (little known outside Bengal before 1949) as the national anthem perhaps because, apart from having been composed by the great poet, it abounds in Sanskrit phraseology and Hindu religious concepts. *Bande Matram* and *Sare Jahan se Achha* failed to pass

the test. *Bande Matram*, it will be recalled, had been culled from the anti-Muslim novel *Anand Math;* it defines India as mother goddess and is full of idolatrous imageries repugnant to Muslim religious sentiment. *Sare Jahan se Achha* is in simple Urdu, sweet, elegant, passionately nationalistic, secular and deeply stirring. Yet while *Bande Matram* was to enjoy an honour, second to *Jana Gana Mana*, of being a national song, *Sare Jahan se Achha* fell from grace. The anti-Muslim outlook of Chatterji was condoned but not Iqbal's disqualification of being a Muslim though there are millions in India who admire and love his poetry. Even Niharranjan Ray who has taken sufficient pains to justify the anti-Muslim attitude of Bankim Chatterji, remarked :

> Who would doubt that the conception and concretization of the image of the Mother in the Vandematram song, howsoever precise and aesthetically effective, is essentially a Brahminical one and cannot by any stretch of imagination have any appeal for a Muslim or a Christian, and that it would indeed be distasteful to them. [1]

The Vedic mantra *satyameva jayate* (truth alone triumphs) was made the national motto and it was inscribed on all state emblems, important offical publications and even on letter heads used by state dignitaries. No doubt the saying is excellent, inspiring and unexceptionable but one is left to wonder why a suitable saying of a venerable thinker could not be chosen from modern Indian sercular literature for the purpose and it had to be dug out from an ancient Hindu scripture.

Among the Directive Principles of State Policy is one purporting to ban throughout Bharat the slaughter of cows, the animal sacred in the eyes of most Hindus. When the clause was moved in the Constituent Assembly, a Congress Minister of Assam protested on November 19, 1949 :

> It will not be economic at all to prevent the slaughter of cows under all circumstances. If it means total prohibition, that will be a blot (on the Constitution) and an oppression to some people,

[1] *Nationalism in India* by Niharranjan Ray, p. 73

> especially to the hill people who eat beef and raise cattle for the purpose. It will also be an oppression to people who slaughter cows in sacrifice. Even the Hindu Gurkhas in Assam sacrifice buffaloes at the time of Durga Puja.

Of course, the 80 million Muslims and some other minorities whom the minister did not mention, are beef-eaters. But in disregard of the rights and habits of the millions of non-Hindus the directive principle was adopted because cow became an object of veneration in the eyes of orthodox Hindus in the Gupta Age after the downfall of Buddhism.

Consequently, one after another, a number of state governments banned cow-slaughter. Such arbitrary action could not bring Hindus closer to non-Hindus; the Muslims only chafed at the denial to them of a fundamental right to eat what they like.

The cleavage between Hindus and Muslims widened for other reasons too. The nationalist Hindus cannot reconcile themselves to the Partition and continue to believe that the entire subcontinent belongs to them and non-Hindus can live in it, as the ancient lawgiver Medatithi has directed, when, and only, if they accept Brahmin culture.

In a conversation with Leonard Mosley in 1960, Nehru blurted out :

> The truth is that we are tired men, and we are getting on in years too. Few of us could stand the prospect of going to prison again and if we had stood out for a united India as we wished it, prison obviously awaited us... The plan for Partition offered a way out and we took it; *we expected that Partition would be temporary, that Pakistan was bound to come back to us.* (italics mine)[1]

Nehru was not alone to entertain such a hope. It was a common belief among the Hindus that with the disappearance of "satanic" British rule, as Gandhi called it, Muslims would realize the folly of getting the subcontinent partitioned, have favourable opinion of Hindu character, and desire Pakistan to be reunited with Bharat. The desire could materialize if the

1 *The History and Culture of the Indian People, Vol Eleven*, p. 769.

Muslims were enabled to have a happier experience of the Hindus in power. No such change for the better was discernible after independence. On the contrary, apart from the accession of Kashmir to India by a fraudulent method, the Congress leaders, puffed up with awareness of India's superior might, behaved in a supercilious manner as to make reconciliation a vain dream.

In *the Hind Swaraj* Mahatma Gandhi had said about the British:

> If they wish to remain in India with their civilisation there is no room for them. It lies with us to bring about such a state of things. If we keep our own house in order only those who are fit to live in it will remain. Others will leave of their own accord.

Though the warning was meant for the British it also indicated the attitude of mind towards non-Hindu minorities which cherished their own culture and civilisation.

Expressing the common feeling of Hindus in India, Purshottam Das Tandon, who was later elected President of the Congress, said on August 15, 1948, at Jabalpur :

> There should not be any more talk of separate culture and language in the Indian Union. There should be no room for such persons in the Indian Union who advocate separate culture and separate language for a particular community; (if) such people cannot change their outlook and pledge their unstinted loyalty to the Indian Union, they should quit India and sooner they do so the better for them and India.

Refusal of non-Hindus, particularly the Muslims, to assimilate with the majority of the people has hampered the growth of national consciousness in India and caused perplexity to democratic patriots. But had P. D. Tandon cared to dispassionately study the reasons for it he would have found the main one in the casteridden outlook of the Hindus. Assimilation is the process of interpenetration and fusion of the customs, traditions and historical backgrounds of different ethnic and religious groups in a manner that their major cultural distinctions become synthesized into one culture and

the groups become one people sharing privileges and responsibilities of a common society. Such a process of assimilation is not allowed to develop in this country. Hence the keen desire of the Muslims to preserve their identity, culture and language which unjustifiably makes the Hindu nationalist indignant.

Dislike it as much as we may, the Hindus and the Muslims have been for centuries, and remain to this day, mentally far removed from each other. Even the growth of political consciousness in the current century did not foster national sentiments but only aggravated the communal and separatist outlook of the people. They admire different traditions, observe different customs, adore different heroes and even interpret historical events differently. As has been pointed out by R.C. Majumdar :

> The historic consciousness operated upon the two major elements of the population, the Hindus and the Muslims, in diametrically opposite ways. Every historical incident in the past which reflected glory upon the one was a humiliating memory to the other. The triumphs of Muhammad Qasim, Sultan Muhamud of Ghazni and Muhammad Gauri which swelled the pride of the Muslims as a great conquering nation of the world only evoked painful memories of the national degradation and humiliation in the minds of the Hindus.[1]

The historian could well have added that Shivaji and Rana Pratap whom Muslims dislike for having been rebels against Mughal rule, and indeed consider them as anti-Muslim brigands, are glorified by the Hindus and raised on the pedestal of great national heroes. If the Hindus cannot give up their narrow approach to history how can they expect the Muslims to do so?

Fed during long decades of freedom struggle on the slogan that mutual distrust of Hindus and Muslims is a creation of British imperialists to perpetuate their own rule, a simple-minded and peace-loving Indian is baffled by the fact that the communal situation has worsened after independence. The oversimplified manner in which the problem was presented

[1] *The History and Culture of the Indian People, Volume Ten.* p. 477.

by the leaders before attaining sovereign power raised the hope that clashes between followers of the two faiths would cease with the exit of the foreign ruler. That has not come to pass. On the contrary, to our shame, nasty communal riots have become nastier and numerous, and according to one estimate the number of victims of religious frenzy after independence has been larger than the number of those who suffered in such clashes during the entire period of British rule.

It may be added in fairness that in the past some of of these riots got started by provocations of foolish deeds of Muslim mountebanks; also that many innocent Hindus too suffered in the disturbances at the hands of Muslim miscreants. It must at the same time be recognised that the Muslims often find themselves in a desperate position and decide to take the initiative to kill because they feel convinced that in any case they are going to be killed.

There is a common feeling among the Muslims that during the days of communal disturbances they do not get from the police and local administration the protection to which a citizen is entitled. In many cases under Congress and Janata regimes, when massacres were taking place local authorities at best looked the other way, if they did not actually help and support the Hindu culprits.

Having wholeheartedly supported the pernicious two-nation theory during the last phase of the freedom struggle, the Muslims found themselves in a most unenviable position after independence. Those living in the Hindu majority areas of the subcontinent had, incredibly, forgotten that even after the creation of Pakistan most of them would continue to live where they were born and the intensification of communal mentality would be hurtful to themselves. Had the total exchange of population taken place, as had been suggested by some politicians, it would perhaps have been different; but it was understood on all hands that the wholesale exchange was an immoral, impracticable, indeed an impossible task which no responsible agency was prepared to undertake or even to envisage. Therefore, minorities in both India and Pakistan were reduced to a pathetic plight. They were reckoned as an

anti-national element, a fifth column by the majority community in both the sovereign states.

For every misbehaviour on the part of Pakistan, the Muslims in India had to share the blame; the Muslims in India were suspected of being agents of the Pakistan Government. That was so because after partition sympathy of Indian Muslims was more with Pakistan than with India as it should have been. Similarly Pakistani Hindus instead of cherishing loyalty to Pakistan as their motherland looked more towards India as a friend in time of distress.

The Hindu-Muslim problem has thus got inextricably intertwined with Indo-Pakistan relations. A clash between the two countries is only a new and additional form of Hindu-Muslim antagonism. The communal quarrel after Partition has tended to rise to the plane of an international dispute.

In the climate of fear, distrust and antagonism, Muslims have been unable to get assimilated in the Indian Nation. They feel that though they live in India they are no part of Indian society; they feel they are deprived of the rights guaranteed in the Constitution to all people and discriminated against. "In the rapidly deteriorating economic conditions in the country, Muslims are hit the hardest. There are not even clerical posts or chaprasis jobs available to them. Most commercial concerns are Hindu and controlled by members of one family who prefer to employ their own relations. Anti-Muslim prejudice is equally manifest in large industrial enterprises including those in the public sector. The situation in Government services is no better".[1]

[1] Inder Malhotra in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, April 22, 1973.

CHAPTER THREE

Words and Deeds

Emulating the Gupta emperors and accepting their political philosophy as the best, Nehru Government could not resist the urge of expanding Indian territories by occupying Kashmir (majority Muslim), Nagaland (majority Christian), Hyderabad, Junagadh and Goa with the force of arms.

The most unfortunate step taken by Nehru at the advent of independence which widened the chasm between India and Pakistan was acceptance of the accession offer made by Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, in October, 1947, without securing the free consent of the people of the State. Being a princely territory with predominantly Muslim population, Jammu and Kashmir, in accordance with the principles which governed the partition of the subcontinent should have formed, if the Kashmiris did not oppose it, a part of the newly-created Islamic State of Pakistan. Logically, it is true, the multicultural State should have been divided and the Hindu-majority region of Jammu and Buddhist-majority area of Ladakh allowed to accede to India if the local population so desired. But there was no justification for annexing the Muslim majority areas of the State without seeking the free consent of its inhabitants in an impartial and fair referendum.

India had to go thrice to war—in 1947, 1965 and 1971—with Pakistan primarily because of the Kashmir dispute. The first of these clashes occurred in the lifetime of Nehru. He has said that Mahatma Gandhi who hated war and opposed violence as a matter of principle, had given his blessings for success of Indian troops who were despatched to the turbulent valley to suppress local patriots and freedom fighters, besides

liquidation of intruding armed tribesmen from Pakistan. It is a sad commentry on Gandhi's integrity for in reply to a report on the first political and communal disturbances of 1931-33 in the Kashmir State which I submitted to the Mahatma in early thirties, he categorically stated in his reply dated May 15, 1934 :

> Seeing that Kashmir is predominantly Mussalman it is bound one day to become a Mussalman State. A Hindu prince can therefore only rule by not ruling, i.e. by allowing the Mussalmans to do as they like or by abdicating when they are manifestly going wrong.

When the opportunity arrived for Kashmir Mussalmans "to do as they liked" the Mahatma blessed the Indian army which had been despatched to protect Maharaja's rule by suppressing the freedom-loving Mussalmans and preventing them from fulfilling their legitimate desire. What an example of devotion to truth and non-violence !

If Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister, was a queer amalgam of Eastern and Western cultures, Babu Rajendra Prasad (1884-1963), first President of India, did not suffer from any mental confusion; he was a convinced believer, an embodiment of Hindu culture and Brahmin traditions as laid down in *Ramcharitmanas*.

Prasad was elected as titular head of Indian Republic in 1950 after the New Constitution had been adopted by the Constituent Assembly. A brilliant and reputed lawyer from Bihar, he had distinguished himself as an erudite scholar and a humble man committed to the ideal of simple living and spartan habits. He wrote a book on division of India and an autobiography. But of his writings more arresting is the collection of letters which he addressed to his lady secretary, Gyanwati Darbar, during the days he occupied the presidential palace known as Rashtrapati Bhavan. The collection entitled *Portrait of a President* gives a clear insight into the mind and character of Rajendra Prasad.

Extremely orthodox in his beliefs, Prasad had converted a part of the presidential palace into a Hindu temple where he

regularly offered puja (worship) to Brahmin idols and recited portions of the Gita early in the morning. The palace became a rendezvous of all kinds of mendicants, godmen, astrologers, palmists and others. Rajendra Prasad widely toured the country frequenting famous *tirthas* (religious places) like Hardwar, Kashi and Tirupati where he washed the feet of Brahmins in recognition of their superiority among Hindus and his faith in *varnashrama dharma*. Like the illustrious Vivekananda and Aurobindo Ghose, Prasad too attended seances where, according to Brahmin belief, a medium receives communications from the dead. At one of the seances the spirit of Gandhi is reported to have appeared, Rajendra Prasad asked for a message in writing. On May 16, 1958, (ten years after Gandhi's assassination) the late President records: "I got a letter written in Bapu's (Gandhi's) own hand." No one has ever seen this incredible letter written by the dead Mahatma. Was the letter a reality, a hoax or only a figment of Prasad's imagination?

Rajendra Prasad's faith in the powers and predictions of sadhus was astounding. To cure his chronic asthma and headache he secured *vibhutis* (sacred ashes) from yogis for application to the ailing limbs of his body.

With his unshakable faith in astrology, Prasad stressed that no important State measure be taken without the approval of Brahmin soothsayers. He moaned that "many of our plans went awry because they were launched on inauspicious days."

The next occupant of the presidential gaddi, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, was no less a staunch believer in the Brahmin scriptures, doctrines and dogmas. Having identified himself with Hindu revivalism sponsored by ruling Congress party and provided its philosophical base, no persuasion was needed on behalf of Nehru to make the Professor accept, in 1949, the offer of a diplomatic assignment. Radhakrishnan had already functioned as a member of the Constituent Assembly from 1947-49, when he was deputed as ambassador to Moscow. The relations between India and USSR at the time were none-

too-happy. Russian leaders called Nehru "running dog of British Imperialism". After cooling his heels at Moscow for many a month, Radhakrishnan was fortunate to have an interview with Joseph Stalin, the atheist dictator of USSR. "It must be set down as one of the miracles in modern diplomacy," wrote Radhakrishnan's biographer, K. Ishwar Dutt, "that one who never concealed his horror of a godless system, won the confidence and respect of the Soviets"[1] Possibly Stalin found out that Radhakrishnan was a man whose philosophy could be moulded according to exigency of the time and therefore patronised him.

Did the dictator also realize that there was much in common between Brahminism and Russian Communism?

In recognition of his services in Moscow, Nehru got Radhakrishnan elected as Vice-President of India in 1952 and the Government conferred, in 1954, the highest honour of Bharat Ratna on him. *Kama* (desire) in him having been aroused, the savant aspired to be the President of the Republic when the next election for the august position fell due in 1957. But the more influential and clever Rajendra Prasad managed to get himself reelected and the Brahmin-philosopher failed to secure the coveted prize. "It was doubtless a great strain to Radhakrisnan" says Dutt, "to have been kept in suspence and a greater strain it was to have been subsequently made to feel, much like Curzon in 1923, that he was dodged of his destiny".[2] Radhakrishnan thought of resigning but was advised by friends to have patience. At long last his burning ambition was fulfilled in 1962, when he rose to the highest rung of the ladder by becoming the President of India. He was hailed by his numerous admirers as the philosopher-king described in Plato's *Republic* and the Indians expected the second "golden age" to come to fruition under his presidentship.

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[1] *Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, p. 94.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100. Such feelings could not enhance the reputation of a Vedantin and believer in the Gita Doctrine which repeatedly stresses the importance of *sukh-dukh samah* (maintaining balance and calm in pleasure and pain).

Radhakrishnan had in a broadcast speech on the day of independence, August 15, 1947, warned people of "our domestic despotism, our intolerance which have assumed the different forms of obscurantism, of narrow-mindedness, and of superstitious bigotry". He had also pointed out the ills from which India suffered and to which it could fall victim after freedom. He depicted the Indian scene in a remarkable paragraph:

> Our opportunities are great but let me warn you that when power outstrips ability, we will fall on evil days. We should develop competence and ability which would help us to utilise the opportunities which are now open to us. From tomorrow morning—from midnight today—we can no longer throw the blame on the British. We have to assume the responsibility ourselves for what we do. A free India will be judged by the way in which it will serve the interests of the common man in the matter of food, clothing, shelter and the social services. Unless we destroy corruption in high places, root out every trace of nepotism, love of power, profiteering and black marketing which have spoiled the good name of this great country in recent times, we will not be able to raise the standards of efficiency in administration as well as in the production and distribution of the good life.[1]

Fine ideas indeed, more so when uttered by a Brahmin philosopher. The moral, economic and political conditions had already put on a dismal shape when Radhakrishnan became the President. With his momentous Independence-day declaration still lingering in their memory, Indians expected a new bright chapter to open in their history when he asumed charge as Head of the Republic. But during the entire period of his presidentship the situation aggravated and the very evils against which he put the country on guard, took an uglier shape. Barely a few months after he took over the highest office the Indo-China war broke out and despite his vaunted philosophy he discreetly supported the dubious case of his government. But a stranger thing had yet to happen.

In a broadcast address to the Nation on August 15, 1965, Radhakrishnan in the characteristic Brahmin fashion,

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[1] *Ibid.*

advised:

> If we profess fidelity to the principles and institutions of the United Nations and use military power in our actual dealings to enforce our views, we will be condemned as hypocrites. If we believe in peaceful coexistence and not power politics, we should not look upon our enemies with desdain and we should not assume that we are always right and our enemies always wrong. We must achieve a world of law and free choice, abolishing from it violence and coercion. Not merely charity, but humane, peaceful settlement of international disputes should also begin at home.[1]

Hardly one month later, the philosopher-king witnessed a second war, this time between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. He easily forgot the axiom he had proclaimed; Hindu patriotism eclipsed the perennial philosophy of the upanishads. He was second to none in holding that his country was absolutely right and Pakistan wholly wrong.

The tension born of guilty conscience could not but affect the physical and moral health of Dr. Radhakrishnan. He gradually ceased to be the old, active and vivacious self and grew quite weak unable even to attend to his office routine. He talked incoherently and could not move about without support. Yet, unbelievably, the great propounder of *nishkama karma* (desireless work) of the Gita in contemporary times, yearned to be reelected, in 1967, for the second time to Presidentship. He did not succeed in this endeavour due to the opposition of scheming politicians and was forced to go into retirement.

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[1] *Ibid.*

CHPTER FOUR

Nehru's Achievements And Failures

Barely four and half months after independence India witnessed a horrifying event of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

Emulating Medatithi, the eminent Brahmin lawgiver of the medieval times, Gandhi had stressed in the *Hind Swaraj* that there was no room in India for the British who adhere to their own culture and civilization. Unfortunately the attitude of intolerance manifest in this mischeivous suggestion was applied to non-Hindus in general and became a feature of Indian nationalism. At the time of independence it worked havoc.

India witnessed religious bigotry bordering on savagery in 1946-47; it reached its apogee after independence. Aghast at the massacres which the Mahatma could not believe to be outcome of his own outmoded philosophy he frequently condemned fanaticism and called for friendliness towards minorities, particularly the Muslims. But his passionate pleas fell on deaf ears and were brusquely rejected by those Hindus who had imbibed the techings of *the Bhagavad-Gita, the Ramcharitmanas* and the *Hind Swaraj.* The Mahatma was hoisted with his own petard. When India went up in flames of religious frenzy before and after the partition, he lost zest for life, felt dejected and cried that he had no desire to live any longer. Then on January 30, 1948, a heartless Hindu fanatic, Nathuram Godse, fired three shots at point blank range, which killed the Mahatma instantaneously in the presence of a large number of his followers in the garden of thc Birla House in New Delhi.

Gandhi's three fondly cherished principles of truth, non-violence and unity of India lay in shambles. But he was succes-

ful in having descredied modern rational-scientific culture and the British nation in the eyes of his countrymen. He could also derive fullest satisfaction that the power in residual India, that is Bharat, had fallen into the hands of Hindu revivalists and not atheists nor social revolutionaries. Nevertheless, the Mahatma was bitter and disappointed at the turn of events. In a talk with one of his intimate devotees, Sri Prakasha, on January 3, 1948, only 27 days before his death, he sorely confessed: "All my work of a lifetime has been entirely ruined."[1]

In the unsettled conditions of the country Gandhi's death was an unbearable calamity. But Jawaharlal Nehru managed heriocally to survive the shock and control the situation. The manner by which he for once co-ordinated his head and heart, intellect and emotion at the time of the great trial drew admiration even from his bitterest opponents.

Jawaharlal Nehru was a champion of civil liberties and freedom of Press. Seldom he consciously tried to suppress any individual for expressing his honest views or voicing his real feelings. It may be that in the early years of independence when the Congress Party enjoyed widespread popularity and Nehru had an aura of magnificence, a charisma which no other leader possessed, he could afford to be frequently liberal and overlook the opposition of those who were in a negligible minority. Generally, his weaknesses, shortcomings and blunders were forgiven by the nation. How he would have reacted when people were disillusioned and disenchanted by the misdeeds of Congress rulers in subsequent years and lost faith in the leadership, can only be surmised. He had begun to expose his clay feet just before death claimed him in May 1964, and it is difficult to say how he would have dealt with the popular discontent. Nevertheless, there is no denying that so long as he lived he was steadfast in upholding civil liberties and freedom of the Press. Speaking from personal experience I can record in fairness that whenever any infringement of individual freedom was brought to his notice, he promptly took action to set it right.

[1] *Annie Besant* by Sri Prakasha, p. 63.

Addressing All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference in New Delhi on December 3, 1950, he firmly announced:

> To my mind, the freedom of the Press is not just a slogan from the larger point of view but is an essential attribute of the democratic process. I have no doubt that even if the Government dislikes the liberties taken by the Press and considers them dangerous, it is wrong to interfere with the freedom of the Press. By imposing restrictions you do not change anything, thereby (only) causing the ideas and the thoughts underlying them to spread further. *Therefore I would rather have a completely free Press with all the danger involved in the wrong use of that freedom than a suppressed or regulated Press.* (emphasis mine)

In making these observations Nehru was following the Voltarian philosophy and the traditions laid by liberals among the British rulers who fought for free expression of Indian opinion in the Press when censorship was imposed on vernacular newspapers in 1870s.

Jawaharlal Nehru's substantial achievements were in the field of education, science and industrialization. Success in these fields attended on him because at times he daringly opposed irrational beliefs of orthodox Hindus and primitive notions of Gandhi.

Education was placed in the concurrent list of the Constitution and both the Centre and the states can formulate plans and adopt measures for its spread at various levels. Enormous amounts were allocated in Central and state budgets by the Congress governments to establish new universities on Western lines and start primary and higher standard schools in remote parts of the country, and inter and degree colleges in towns and cities. Both sexes benifited by the liberal grants and hundreds of thousands completed higher education who could not have been able to do so in pre-1947 days. This is an accomplishment indeed. Yet 32 years after independence the percentage of literacy is as low as 31 and 69 per cent of the Indians continue to remain in the dark sector, totally illiterate. This in spite of the fact that the Constitution directed to end illiteracy within 12 years of its promulgation.

Inspired by and under the guidance of Nehru three national academies—Sahitya Akademi (Academy of Literature) Lalitkala Akademi (Academy of Fine Arts) and Sangeet Natak Akademi (Academy of Song and Drama)—were founded to give impetus to the spirit of creativity in different fields of culture. As autonomous bodies the academies started well and did some useful work for a space rendering help to needy litterateurs and artists by providing them opportunities for unfoldment of their talent; indeed, many a budding genius would probably have faded before flowering but for the timely succour they received from one or the other of the academies while directly or indirectly connected with it.

Though claiming to assist creative faculty without consideration of the nature of creation, the academies betrayed their flaws by keeping at an arm's length non-conformists however highly gifted; they were discouraged and in fact their productions were ignored, looked down upon and even ridiculed. This led to factions and the powers that be saw to it that only those patronized by the rulers and willing to toe the conventional line were in complete possession of the academies. Imbibing the narrow spirit of Hindu nationalism, the academies fell from the lofty standard of humanist culture and assumed the role of apologists of the Establishment. Consequently the real art in post-independence India was born and has struggled to exist and develop, outside the precincts of the academies. Nevertheless, for generating a climate of refinement, for arousing interest in the cultural activities and in multiplying the number of culture consumers the credit goes mostly to the three academies.

Defying Gandhi's theory that science is evil, Nehru got well-equipped science libraries established in different parts of the country where intelligent young men and women are being trained on Western lines and afforded adequate opportunities for conducting research. As early as April 15, 1948, the Indian Atomic Energy Act was adopted and soon after Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) set up. The first atomic reactor called *Apsara* (Celestial Dancer) was opened at Trombay on

January 20, 1957, with the generous assistance of Canada. In subsequent years three more reactors were installed in different parts of the country, the last one at Narona in U.P. on January 13, 1974.

Participating in the scientific activities and guiding the progressive rise of the laboratories and reactors, were Dr. Homi Jehangir Babha (1909-1966), Dr. K.S. Krishnan (1898-1961), Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Dr. D.S. Kothari (b. 1906), Dr. S. Chandrashekhar (b. 1910) and Dr. H.N. Sethna—to name only a few of the luminaries who made valuable contributions to the growth of scientific spirit in the country.

Through industriousness, extensive study and intense research at these centres, Indian scientists achieved one success after another culminating in an underground detonation of nuclear device on May 18, 1974, at Pokharan in Thar desert of Rajasthan. India was the sixth nation to have exploded a nuclear device but she had an edge over her predecessors in one respect. No other power had its first test conducted under ground which requires a high degree of sophistication and technological expertise. A completely contained explosion as the one at Pokharan is a more complicated affair than an open explosion. Besides, the fallout, harmful to life in the nearby areas, was the minimum; Indian scientists said it was almost nil.

We shall later discuss the ethical and economic implications of the explosion but here it is relevant to underline that the successful experiment amply proved that there is no lack of talent in India; released from the suffocating hold of Brahminism, Indian scientists and technicians can march forward and scale heights of knowledge like their counterparts in any advanced country.

Again, disregarding Gandhi's fallacious notions against industrialization, Nehru set up the Planning Commission with himself as chairman, and got the first Five-Year Plan for social reconstruction of India prepared. In March, 1950, the Indian Government adopted a resolution declaring that the aim of planning was "to promote a rapid rise in the standard of

living of the people by efficient exploitation of the resources of the country, increasing production and offering opportunities to all for employment in the service of the community." The goal was to be attained by the method of mixed economy; while private enterprise was allowed to continue, public undertakings to be run by the State were also to start and exist side by side; both were expected to contribute to the production of national wealth and thus usher in economic emancipation of the country without which political freedom is meaningless. Under Nehru, two Five-Year Plans were prepared, adopted and implemented; the third Plan was in operation when he passed away in May, 1964.

India achieved a fair measure of success in the field of public investment—basic industries, power, transport and higher education. With foreign collaboration steel mills and other big industries were constructed in different parts of the country to produce both capital goods and consumer commodities. A degree of success was also achieved in pushing up the rate of savings in economy. Economist B.S. Minhas calculated that while in 1954-55 gross domestic savings, a proportion of gross domestic product stood around 10 per cent in 1964-65 it had grown to about 15 per cent.

But this is all that can be said to be on the credit side of ledger of planning; much more is on the debit side.

Nehru was obsessed with the idea of making India a "big power" in disregard of the fact whether or not the common man's lot bettered in the process. It was his consuming passion. The way that suggested to him for achieving "bigness" was through industrialization at any cost. Having been bitten with socialist bug early in life, he generally distrusted capitalists and entrepreneurs; he had pinned hopes on State enterprise and, therefore, paid greater attention to setting up public undertakings even when the government did not possess wherewithal for doing so.

When Nehru decided to build the public sector and rapidly expand it, he gave little thought to the non-availability of trained personnel to run it. He entertained an illusion that there were talented Congress leaders or favourite bureaucrats

who could efficiently handle and manage any industry, big or small, which the Government proposed to start. Such a decision was unfortunate and bound to prove disastrous. When a number of public sector projects had been launched early in the sixties, an US expert noted that the managerial structure was totally inadequate for the successful operation of large enterprises. These jaggernauts had become no more than government departments. The saddest failure related to the appointment of men who were incompetent to run them.

In course of time, State undertakings came to be regarded as family enterprises. Nehru thought that only Congressmen could fully appreciate the social philosophy underlying the public sector. The managerial posts soon became consolation prizes for spent-up politicians, sinecures for retiring civil servants or stepping-stones for friends and relatives of Congress highups. It did not occur to the Congress leadership that political experience or official background are of little use in an industrial environment where innovation and creativity are the qualifications required for rapid expansion. As the, then, Minister of Heavy Industry, T.A. Pai, was forced to remark:

> Wrong men in key positions in public undertakings and the ignorance of their crucial role, were responsible for the non-fulfilment of the economic goals of the Government. Industrial units functioned as civil service departments without the vitality of commercial undertakings.

Matters became worse when the board of directors of a concern was also packed with friends of the celebrities in power or bureaucrats in good books of the ministers. In 1971-72, more than 30 top posts of nearly 20 undertakings were lying vacant because Congress rulers were unable to find favourites to appoint. No wonder, most of the undertakings suffered colossal loss and the country had to pay through its nose for the follies of the inefficient mercenaries or superannuated bureaucrats placed in their charge.

In his preoccupation with industrialisation, Nehru over-

looked development of agricultural sector to the requisite degree.

India is an agricultural country and over seventy per cent of its people live on the produce of land. But the majority of those who cultivate the soil do not own it; they labour as tenants. During the days of freedom struggle Congress leaders made repeated and solemn declarations that after achievement of freedom national government would transfer ownership of land to those who till it. India has been free for 32 years and top national leaders have been in power for all the period. But the pledge given to toiling, teeming peasant masses remains unredeemed more or less in all the states.

Declaring wholesale transfer of land to tillers as inexpedient and impracticable national government conceived the idea of imposing ceiling on landholdings and distributing surplus land among the landless peasantry. But the state governments dominated by landlords and their henchmen-politicians watered down the idea while implementing the scheme. In Haryana and the Punjab (except Pepsu areas) there was no ceiling on ownership. Ceiling on family basis was introduced in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, Mysore, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Manipur and Tripura. In other states it was applicable to the holdings in the name of individual landowner. This enabled different members of the same family to own land upto the ceiling fixed. Statements were made in Parliament that pet dogs and horses declared as members of landowning families, were allotted land under this plan.

The ceiling was placed unreasonably high and differed from state to state. In Andhra Pradesh it varied according to the quality of the soil from 27 to 324 acres, in Bihar 20 to 60 acres, in Gujarat 10 to 132 acres, in Maharashtra 18 to 126 acres, in Orissa 20 to 50 acres, in Uttar Pradesh 40 to 80 acres, in Himachal Pradesh 27 to 100 acres. The ceiling in respect of a family in Kerala varied from 6 to 20 acres, in Mysore 27 to 216 acres and in Delhi 24 to 80 acres.

With such high ceilings and misapplication of laws, it was

little surprise that at the end of the Third Plan period no more than 2.36 million acres were released by landlords and only 1.14 million acres were actually distributed among landless tenants. Amazingly, in some states landlords were made responsible for ensuring implementation of land reform legislation. In Orissa Raja S.N. Bhanjdeo who owned no less than 4000 hectares of land was nominated as chairman of the commission appointed by the state government as a watchdog to see that land reforms were efficiently executed !

Some of the cultivable land belonging to the state which could have been given to landless peasants without difficulty or delay was grabbed by political leaders wielding influence in government circles. A good chunk of the surplus land vacated by old kulaks was skilfully taken over by wealthy people under land reform regulations. A new absentee land owning class had thus arisen in independent India besides the old hereditary landlord class.

There is no gainsaying the fact that landownership problem is beset with enormous difficulties. Nevertheless on its equitable solution mainly depends the future of India.

With hostile China and unfriendly Pakistan across the border and some other nations, big and small, distrustful of, if not opposed to her, India had to spend a large slice of its budget on defence forces and purchase of huge military hardware. It is depressing, though not surprising, to find that instead of checking chauvinistic tendencies in the country members of Parliament, most of them devotees of Apostle of Non-violence, should readily vote for ever-increasing amounts for purchase of weapons of destruction and massacre. The Defence Budget which started with around Rs. 50 crores in the year of independence rose to Rs. 425.3 crores in 1962-63, and thereafter went on increasing year after year till it touched nearly Rs. 2,800 crores in 1979-80.

According to an official brochure, the Indian army of 825,000 well-trained and well-equipped men constitutes, in terms of military power, the fourth largest armed force in the world; the Indian Air Force of more than 45 squadrons

is considered fifth or sixth largest air force; and the Indian Navy has grown into a powerful force thought to be eighth or ninth largest in the world.

India manufactures light machine guns, mortars, anti-tank guns, mountain artillery guns, anti-aircraft guns, medium tank Vijayanta and other sophisticated communication equipment including radar.[1]

Those patriotic Indians who loudly acclaim Gandhi's non-violence and humanism are also proud of their country's military might and ability to manufacture weapons of destruction.

The excessively praised Guptas had profited by the political institutions evolved and established during the period of Buddhist Revolution; it enabled them to maintain stability and integrity of the vast areas in their possession. Yet, after they had succeeded in doing so, because of their desire to strengthen neo-Brahminism, they eroded the same institutions. It ushered in the dark age which caused regression, general apathy, mass discontent, social degradation, lawlessness and chaos. Nehru and his successors faithfully followed this policy.

No sooner was administrative stability restored and constitutional government established after the Partition than the national leadership embarked upon obliterating memories of the Western (and modern) influences which seemed to militate against ancient Hindu culture. The axe fell on English language which was not forgiven for having unified the country and created the national consciousness in a medley of linguistic and ethnic elements. Nor was the importance of English as an international language and, therefore, of great utility to independent India, given any serious thought. Curiously the socialists formed the vanguard of *angrezi hatao* (remove English) forces which of course included nationalists and ultra-nationalists of all hues.

Next to be distroyed were the statues of British rulers installed at public places which reminded the nationalists not only of the days of foreign domination but of the exotic

[1] *The Indian Express*, October 28, 1978.

modern culture which aimed at transplanting Brahminism. To prove the intensity of their patriotism political workers vied with each other in breaking the statues irrespective of the record of doings of those men whom they represented. One of the imposing equestrian statue of King Edward VII beautifed a magnificent park in old Delhi. It was a rare and exquisite piece of art. I frequently used to visit it and derive immeuse pleasure from looking at it The Gandhian patriots insisted on removing it from public gaze. The Canadian Government pleaded with the Indian authorities to gift the statue to them and gracefully accepted it when offered. To the good fortune of Canadian people the statue now adorns a park in that country. The nationalist Indians feel ashamed of owning the cultral acquisitions of the Birtish period. What has therefore been our loss in cultural heritage has become a national gain of the Canadians merely through their broadmindedness and farsight

Even the statue of Sir Thomas Munroe (who was called Mandav Rishi by Indians in his time for his good deeds) was not spared. Nothing could be more vulgar and uncivilised; yet not even the smallest finger was raised by the Congress rulers to stop this patriotic frenzy and fanaticism. Nehru connived at it.

The desire to obliterate the historic memories was not confined to the sphere of statues and monuments. It extended to the names of towns and streets and institutions. Hundreds of roads, colleges, schools and libraries bearing the names of the British were rechristened. Sometimes the change effected was ludicrous; for example, when Curzon Road in New Delhi was renamed Kasturba Marg or the Sandhurst Street in Bombay was given the new name of Dayananda Saraswati Street. Recording its emphatic protest at such changes the Bombay Historical Society described it as "vandalism and perversion of historical monuments." The society pointed out in a resolution that in the past roads were named after the personalities who were "instrumental in the development of the city." Expressing strong disapproval in particular at the move to rename Sandhurst Street after Swami Dayananda, the resolution protested that Lord Sandhurst after

whom the road was named was Governor of Bombay during whose regime the Improvement Trust was established. "The Trust" ran the resolution, "effected a tremendous amount of improvement in the health and appearance of the city and raised it to its present level as the first city of the East. Swami Dayananda had to do nothing either with the development or general welfare of the city." But the Society's dissent was a voice in wilderness; fanaticism has scant regard for historical truth.

CHAPTER FIVE

On Road to Ram Rajya

The invincibility of British Imperialism partly rested on the efficiency, loyalty, fearless advice and character of Indian Civil Service (ICS) which had been gradually built up from the early days of the British rule in India.

The gifted and highly trained men of the Civil Service had in the first half of the nineteenth century ended anarchy and, through a number of social, economic and political reforms, pulled out the dehumanised Indians from medieval darkness bringing some light and sunshine in their life. The Congressmen hated the Service merely because during the days of satyagraha agitations the ICS men remained loyal to the British, ably discharged their responsibilities, did not flinch and did not allow the country to go to dogs. Nehru had a deep grudge against these conscientious men. He has contemptuously referred to them more than once in *The Discovery of India*. His main complaint seems to have been that after 1937 elections they restrained Congress leaders in power in the provinces from becoming partisan and indulging in antisocial practices. When, therefore, he became Prime Minister he often publicly denigrated the Service though, at the same time, he realised that without cooperation and assistance of ICS men he would not be able to hold India together for even a day.

On the morrow of independence, almost all the colourd conscious or self-respecting British members of ICS relinquished their jobs and returned home. The Indian members had either to volunteer for premature retirement or adapt their character to the changed circumstances growing worse year after year under the Congress rule. With the exception of the honourable few they opted for the latter alternative. "Instead

of devoting their time and energy to the works entrusted to them", wrote C.N. Chandra, himself a former member of ICS, "their (leftover ICS men's) sole aim was to please their minister."[1]

Among the educated Indians who imbibed the values of modern, scientific culture and high principles of British administration, the best were ICS men who had been caught young and given an intensive training in England. They were looked upon as the cream of Indian society and finest specimens of Renaissance culture. Nobody could believe that these men would deviate from the path of rectitude after the British had to quit India. Yet under Congress rule the ICS men failed to pass the test and come up to the expected standard; all the glitter of the advanced culture wore thin and they readily conformed with Hindu Nationalism. "To members of the Services, including the ICS, apart from a few individuals, the new administrative concepts were not as unpalatable as I had assumed they would be", lamented N.B. Bonarjee, another notable ICS officer who served under both British raj and Congress rule. "With the liquidation of the ICS as a British Service clearly close at hand the residual few hundred Indians were automatically released from the discipline, conventions and inhibitions of what was essentially an exotic service with an exotic code of conduct. A few perhaps desired to retain something of this imported administrative dharma, but I began to realise at this time that the majority sought a definite break from the immediate past."[2]

The victory of Hindu revivalism coupled with Nehru's unrestrained condemnation of ICS speedily brought out the inborn faculty of the Indian members of the Service. Explaining the change, Bonarjee remarked:

> Personal friendship, family relationship and caste affiliations have always been held in particularly high place in Indian estimation but the tendency to indulge them at the expense of official duty had been kept in the background as long as the ICS remained a British Service.

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[1] *The Civil Servant in India*, p. 300.

[2] *Under Two Masters*, p. 234.

> Now, however, the tides of change broke through the weakened barriers and with the passage of time became so powerful that even a public generally in favour of the exercise of extraneous influences in administrative matters a good deal of criticism had been aroused."[1]

Why did the change for the worse come over the Indian section of ICS men so speedily? Bonarjee answers:

> Great Britain's effective dominian of about a century and a quarter was only one of the many stones cast by destiny into the 4000 years old pool of India's history. Its first consequences, it is true, went deep though not wide, but with the passage of time they became more and more superficial as the ripples and circles spread outwards[2]

Putting an unerring finger at the cause of the degradation of ICS men, Bonarjee concludes:

> It is the Hindu ethos, Hindu Dharma, call it what you will, that the key to an understanding of the free India will be found. Why should it not be frankly conceded that Hindu administrative ethos must differ fundamentally from British since it is deeply in India's past. A public service as an institution with a duty to the people in general is not an Indian creation.[3]

With the restraining force of ICS scrupulously exercised in the British period, removed the Congressmen came into their own and openly misused power and freely resorted to jobbery, bribery and nepotism. Even in the lifetime of Nehru corruption assumed repellant dimensions. His best favourites in state governments were with his knowledge and acquiescence known to have amassed fortunes while in power. "Nehru became an umbrella", says his disillusioned admirer, Inder Malhotra, (now editor *Times of India*) "under which all kinds of small men, big scoundrels, opportunists, time-servers and slimy characters flourished and prospered. He not only suffered fools gladly but rewarded inefficiency, mediocrity, even treachery and ingratitude with high office combined with a virtual license to mint money."[4]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 234.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 236.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 242.
[4] *Illustrated Weekly of India*, November 12, 1972.

Under pressure of public demand enquiry comissions were instituted to examine charges against at least four of Nehru's favourite chief ministers—Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed of Kashmir, Pratap Singh Kairon of the Punjab, Biju Patnaik and Hare Krushna Mehtab of Orissa. All were found guilty of misusing political power and position to unlawfully acquire property and wealth. Scores of other ministers were proved to be thoroughly corrupt. The Congressmen who had during the days of freedom struggle posed as images of simplicity, self-abregation and incorruptibility did not wait long after independence to cash their "sacrifices" for motherland and its people.

Thousands of Congressmen who had courted imprisonment under the Mahatma's leadership were granted life pensions for which there was not only insistent demand but also unseemly scramble. The favourites and obstreperous ones among the "freedom sufferers" who had approach to higher echelons of leadership got more lucrative and comfortable berths as governors, ambassadors in foreign countries or in Congress cabinets. The number of ministers in a state cabinet was not calculated on the basis of real needs and demands of governmental work but with an eye on appeasement of former satyagrahis hungry for power and pelf. Rifts in Congress leadership which became common while distributing spoils of office, were patched up by increase in the number of ministers to accommodate all factions and leave out none disgruntled. This process culminated in the State of Bihar in 1973-74 when no fewer than forty-six ministers formed the Congress government to enable the chief minister to have backing of different party factions in the legislature. Patriotism was everywhere on sale and bargaining consumed most of the time of Congress high command. In 1963, D. Sanjivayya, Congress President, confessed that "one of the reasons for loss of (Congress) prestige was that Congressmen who were paupers in the pre-independence era had become millionaires, some of them owning many cinema houses, huge properties, a fleet of cars and many transport lines."[1] The cant and sanctimony with which

[1] *The Times of India*, New Delhi, August 6,1963.

Gandhians were overlaid in pre-independence days disappeared and Hindu ethos came out in its true colours. India had lost way to morality and democracy.

The influence of ancient Brahmin doctrines as represented by Congress policy and administration was conspicuous in the continued maltreatment of low caste millions whom the Constitution had pompously declared to be free of the stigma of untouchability and to be equal in every respect with upper caste Hindus.

The scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are over 23 per cent of the country's population. Gandhi gave them the flattering name of Harijans (men of God) thinking thereby the stigma would vanish but in daily life it was sarcastically referred to by arrogant and privileged Hindus; it only added to the anguish of the forsaken millions.

On the eve of independence, Dr. Ambedkar was worried about the future of the disinherited and the downtrodden. He asked a number of pertinent questions:

> What will be our fate in free India? I posed that question before Gandhiji and other Congress leaders. We wanted to know what would be our position in their "swrrajya". Will our persecution end? Will our children get the facilities for education? Will our people be able to live free citizens in free India? Will exploitation and oppression end? Will the honour of our women be safe? Neither Gandhiji nor any other leader answered these questions in a satisfactory or straightforward manner.[1]

The developments, as we shall see, during the thirty-two years of independence provide an answer.

Nehru generously offered Ambedkar a seat in his first cabinet as law minister which he gladly accepted. Brahminism was playing the old game of bribing intelligent opponents without yielding on its basic principles. Ambedkar was made the chairman of the committee appointed by the Constituent Assembly to draft a constitution for free India. An untouchable was raised to the exalted position of lawgiver

[1] *Thus Spoke Ambedkar*, p. 35.

of contemporary Hindu society! He was called the modern Manu. As Dhananjay Keer, his biographer, later remarked:

> An untouchable who was kicked out from carts and segregated in schools in his boyhood, who was insulted as a professor and ousted from hotels, hostels, saloons and temples in his youth as a British stooge, despised as a heartless politician and devil, hated as a reviler of the Mahatma and decried as an executive counsellor became now the Law Minister of free nation and the chief architect of the constitution to define the will, aim and vision of India.[1]

But Ambedkar had to learn to his cost that the magnanimous gesture did not alter the fundamental character of Brahmin society which continued to be the same as before. The republican constitution for Independent India was ably drafted under his guidance. He piloted it through the Constituent Assembly which finally adopted it with changes here and there, in November, 1947. This was Ambedkar's most glorious hour and he seemed to have become the hero of Nationalist India. But the victory was illusory.

Sounding a grave warning Ambedkar said in the Constituent Assembly:

> On January 26, 1950, we will have equality in politics and inequality in social and economic life. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest moment, or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.[2]

When in 1951, the Hindu Code Bill was introduced in the Parliament the contradiction between profession and practice of Congressmen, legacy of Brahmin culture, was brought home to Ambedkar. He resigned and went out as a very disappointed man. A more clear-headed rebel could have anticipated this fate by sharing power in a basically antiprogressive government composed of Hindu nationalists.

However, untouchability had been banned in the Consti-

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[1] *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission,*

[2] *Ibid.*

tution and in 1953 the Untouchability Offences Act was passed by Parliament. Under the Act a Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was appointed to report every year to Parliament on the progress made by the most victimised classes of Indian Society.

In a survey conducted in 1972, after 25 years of independence, by the United Press of India, it was revealed that "in many places Harijans are denied access to wells and temples and at some places they are not allowed to use the common highways. They cannot get a barber to shave them. Burning of Harijan huts, murders and persecutions, organised social boycotts and rapes still continue in the rural areas of some states". The survey noted: "A total of 1100 Harijans were murdered in three years from 1967 to 1969 according to the statement of Union Home Minister."[1] In the Rajya Sabha the Minister of State for Home said on December 14, 1972, that "there were 1541 cases of atrocities on Harijans during this period."

In his 20th report for the year 1970-71 the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, giving his "considered view" stated that these backward sections of the society "have not been able to derive the benefits of the socio-economic progress in the country to any appreciable extent. In fact the gap which was already fairly wide at the time of securing political freedom has continued to become wider and wider."

The Commissioner said that the mere explanation that untouchability being a deep-rooted social custom will take time to disappear can no longer satisfy the scheduled castes. In his opinion "the most important requirement is to bring about a change in the thinking of all concerned, be that in Government or at the people's level so that a sense of commitment is created in them."[2]

Meanwhile, so indifferent were the nationalist leaders to the welfare of the oppressed classes that for five years 1966-

[1] *The Indian Express*, September 4, 1972.
[2] *Ibid.*, May 12, 1972.

1971 the Parliament did not care to ask for the reports of the Commissioner nor did the Government consider it their responsibility to obtain them.[1]

The laws are as effective as their implementation. "In principle" wrote the *Indian Express* on November 20, 1976 "the evil (of untouchability) was 'abolished' when the Constitution came into force nearly 27 years ago. But in practice it has *continued to flourish* despite Article 17 of the Constitution, despite the Untouchability Offences Act of 1955, and despite the periodical directives issued by the centre to energise the law enforcement and law dispensing agencies of the states." (emphasis mine)

On December, 6, 1973, a group of untouchables including women with babies in arms set out in Vellore with a ladder and jars of tar to deface the word "Harijan" from all sign boards in the town.[2] It was symbolic of the disillusionment of the dispossessed.

Many years after independence it became manifest that the Congress government had not succeeded in implementing its slogans in any field, domestic or foreign. The failure was writ large on the gloomy face of Mother India.

As Nehru advanced in years and was faced with some frightening problems, mostly his own creation, he sought refuge in the Vedanta and in persons claiming supernatural powers. He took delight in sitting at the feet of a woman ascetic, one Anandamayee Maa of Banaras, reputed for performing miracles. Nehru was seeking refuge in mysticism which brought solace to his tormented soul. Frustration had rendered him insensitive to the offensive atmosphere in which religious zealots have their being. "I felt no magic coming from Ananda's (Anandmayee Maa's) person, and no particular emotion," observed Arthur Koestler who was curious to find out the truth about Hindu saints and spent one year meeting and studying some of them. "The whole scene (in

[1] *Ibid.*, November 16, 1972.

[2] *The Stateman*, December 7, 1973.

Maa's room) gave me a feeling of acute distress, and I began to tip-toe towards the door."[1]

For sixteen years Jawaharlal Nehru bestrode like a colossus the country presiding over the destiny of its people. But in 1963 he was, physically and mentally, a ghost of his old self. Every setback gnawed at his soul. In particular, the failure to wean away Kasmir Muslims from their pro-Pakistan inclinations and the humiliation of defeat at the hands of "Brother" China gave a shattering blow to his robust health; the darling hero of Hindu Nationalism worn-out, depressed and distraught passed away on May 27, 1964, of a stroke. The historian Percival Spear draws a pathetic picture of the dying titan:

> The knell of Nehru's India was sounded by the China incident of November 1962. It marked, in a resounding way, the end of Nehru's dream of pan-Asia leadership and it came just when India's great effort at industrial expansion was flagging, when population was overtaking the increase in the national product and when India's stock in the international field was declining. For Nehru himself it was a mortal blow. For the next eighteen months he was a stricken giant, evading, it is true, attempts at foreign interference while taking unfettered foreign aid, but groping in the dark for new policies which would not come."[2]

The confused and vacillating hero of struggle for feedom whom fate made the first steward of India's destiny was instrumental, however to his dislike, in putting the country on the road to Ram Rajya.

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[1] *The Lotus and the Robot*, pp. 82, 84

[2] *A History of India*, Vol. II, p. 257.

CHAPTER SIX

Wounded Democracy

Erosion of constitutional democracy, inefficiency in administration, deterioration in economy and fall in moral standards took a faster pace under Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi (b. 1919), who assumed premiership early in 1966 on the sudden death of Nehru's successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri (1904-1966), at Tashkent on January 11, 1966. Taught and trained by her father with the conscious purpose of providing a capable leader to the nation, Indira inherited many traits of Nehru's character. She, however, excelled him in some respects, but also lacked many of his virtues. More tactful, decisive and determined though less scrupulous than Nehru, she did not lose temper and had the capacity to listen patiently to the bitterest criticism by her opponents. Like every Indian politician she was hungry for power and would not mind having it by hook or by crook. Conceited like her father but less accommodating than he, she weathered many a storm to maintain herself in the saddle. In utilizing revolutionary slogans to achieve popularity while undermining the pillars of freedom she proved a past master.

Indira Gandhi's coming to power was commented upon in the international Press; an accurate assessment, as the subsequent events proved, was made by the *New York Times* in its editorial:

> Mrs. Gandhi is going to be a very interesting and unusual Prime Minister of India. This is not simply because she is a woman and the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru. She is very much a person in her own right with positive ideas that will not necessarily coincide with those of her father or her predecessor.

Making a brief survey of the Indian scene the editorial

added: "But those who chose her are likely to find that they picked a master and not a servant."

Soon after Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister she contrived to take the various wings of Intelligence Service under her control. As regards publicity media, she utilized without any compunction the services of PIB, Radio, TV. DAVP, DPD and Photo and Films Divisions to achieve her personal aims. It is believed she got dossiers prepared on every important politician whether belonging to her party or to the opposition and when, and if, necessary confronted a recalcitrant leader with his weak points or blemishes in character to cow him down. Not satisfied with it, she started a new intelligence unit, a sort of private secret service, called the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in 1967 for collecting, analysing and correlating information regarding foreign affairs. But soon it also posted the Prime Minister with intelligence about internal matters and the doings of opposition as well as nonconformist Congress Party members. RAW was placed under a Kashmiri Pandit police officer, R.N. Kaw, who took orders directly from her. This spy unit was equipped with its own radio and monitoring station. The antidemocratic services rendered by RAW reminded one of *1984* by George Orwell in so far as keeping strict watch over citizens at different levels was concerned.

Indira Gandhi came to power when Congress stocks had fallen low. In the general elections of 1967 the party lost heavily giving rise to non-Congress multiparty coalition governments in some states though at the Centre Congress continued to hold office with the support of Communist Party (CPI) and some other leftists. It caused a variety of problems, the embittered Centre-state relations being one of the toughest. Many political analysts entertained doubts if the woman Prime Minister would be able to cope with the situation.

The communal issue was assuming unprecedented dimensions. In September, 1969, a dreadful clash occurred in Gujarat when over a thousand innocent men, women and

children were killed and property worth millions of rupees looted or destroyed through arson. It was a ghastly affair and every decent Indian hung his head in shame at the atrocities and butchery that took place during the three days of rioting. The shaken Prime Minister assured the nation that never will her government tolerate preaching of communal hatred or incitement to violence by any individual or group.

Barely four months after the gruesome happenings, a special function was held in Ahmedabad in which Brajnarain Brajesh, President All-India Hindu Mahasabha, described the massacre as *dharma yudha* (righteous war). The Hindu murderers were publicly praised and rewarded for their atrocious deeds during the bloody days. With fiendish pride, Brajesh said that "Ahmedabad has set an example before the country of how to save religion." Five men charged with murder, arson and rioting were adorned with the title of *dharma virs* (heroes of Hindu culture). Among the recipients of the honour, reported the *Times of India* correspondent, was one who had been charged with commiting no fewer than ninety-five murders. The local authorities took no notice of the blatant incitement to violence and let the organisers of the special function go scot free.[1]

It may be added that the obnoxious celebrations were in keeping with the spirit of Hindu nationalism fostered and maintained by the government as evidenced by a notable example.

V.D. Savarkar was a militant Hindu leader who had during his lifetime earned notoriety for his irrepressible fulminations and dark designs against secular politics. He was a rabid communalist and spent many years of his life in making venomous speeches against the Muslims. In a speech which can be said to be typical of his utterances, delivered by Savarkar at the Ahmedabad session of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937, he exploded:

> The state should belong to the Hindus, and the Mohammedans may live there. But the state cannot be a Muslim State nor can it be jointly Hindu-Muslim administered state. . . . To obtain swaraj we do not

[1] *The Times of India*, January 5, 1970.

> need Muslim assistance nor is it our desire to establish a joint rule. The future of the Hindu race of the Hindustan and Punjab rests on these four pillars: (i) Hindu Sangathan, (ii) Hindu Raj, (iii) *Shuddhi* (conversion of Muslims and other non-Hindus to Hinduism) and (iv) the conquest and *Shuddhi* of Afghanistan and the Frontiers.[1]

Savarkar was involved in the Gandhi murder conspiracy, arrested, tried though finally acquitted of the charge. Yet with these antecedents the Indian Government considered him entitled to a national honour. A postage stamp bearing his portrait was issued to commemorate Savarkar's "inestimable services" to the country. His statues were raised at public places in different parts of India.

Indira Gandhi knew and accurately diagnosed that a group of backward-looking, short-visioned and narrow-minded bosses nicknamed the "Syndicate", though disliked by the new generation, were having the stranglehold of the Congress organisation. They stood, she realized, as hurdles on the path of progress, disallowing any radical change in the status quo; therefore, to remove them from the domineering position was her first task, she concluded. Would the people support her?

Before Indira Gandhi headed the Government, she was known to be a sober person with balanced views—rationalist, non-religious, non-communal and progressive, critical of both communism and capitalism and trying to remain at the centre of the road. She had already, as President of the National Congress, proved her capacity of leading a party and as Minister of Information and Broadcasting in Shastri Government, of ably conducting the administration. When, therefore, she started clearing the Augean stables, the people gave clear indications that they stood by her. The first tussle between her and the "Syndicate" took place in August 1969 at the election of the President of India. The Congress bosses nominated Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, Speaker of the

[1] Quoted from Dr. Rajendra Prasad's *India Divided*, 3rd edition, Bombay (1947), p. 19.

Lok Sabha, as the party candidate with Indira's full consent; indeed, she officially proposed the name of Reddy and, as token of her agreement, signed his nomination papers. But a few days later finding that the time was ripe for parting company with the "Syndicate" whose loyalty was doubtful in her estimation, she supported, without any qualms, a rival candidate, V.V. Giri, and launched a vigorous campaign to get him elected. For the first time observers noted her disdain for moral values. However, Giri won and Reddy lost though by only a small majority; it showed the tide had begun to turn against the "Syndicate".

Encouraged by election of her nominee as President of India, Indira Gandhi adopted some measures, notably nationalisation of fourteen big banks against the wishes of the Congress bosses. She deprived Morarji Desai, Deputy Prime Minister and one of the respected figures among the "Syndicate" of the important Finance portfolio which he took as personal humiliation and resigned from the Cabinet in protest. There was a furore at these swift developments in the country's politics. But now confident of being able to take a risk, Indira Gandhi dissolved the Lok Sabha on December 27, 1970, and confronted the country with a mid-term poll. While her adversaries had the sole aim of deposing her by vociferously demanding *Indira hatao* (turn out Indira), she fought with the ear-catching slogan *garibi hatao* (remove poverty) and the nation warmly responded to her call. She won at the hustings with a two-third majority which was beyond even her own expectation. The "Syndicate" was routed never to rise again. Wherever she went unprecedented crowds lustily cheered her. Her star had begun to ascend rapidly.

In the general elections held in December 1969 in Pakistan by Yahya Khan Government, Awami League under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, swept the polls, capturing 167 seats out of 313 in the Pakistan National Assembly and 288 out of 310 seats in East Pakistan provincial legislature. The election results came as a shock to the ruling military junta and acute differences arose in it when the

popular Awami League politicians demanded their due share in the governments, both central and provincial.

Misguided by Z.A. Bhutto and failing to face the situation realistically in a statesman-like manner, General Yahya Khan imposed martial law on East Pakistan. To suppress the uprising, a reign of terror was unleashed by the military authorities posted in Dacca. The army went berserk. With guns and bayonets, tanks and mortars, force and brutality the soldiers tried to control the situation killing thousands and uprooting millions from their ancestral homes. The terror-stricken Hindu Bengalis ran to take shelter in India; a handful of harassed Muslims also joined them. The onrush could have been stemmed by the Indian authorities. But partly on humanitarian grounds but mostly to descredit Pakistan in the eyes of the world, incoming refugees were directly or indirectly welcomed by the Indian leaders; they were sheltered and looked after. But when the small trickle assumed the form of a gigantic river of men, women and children—many of them bedraggled, old and invalid—unceasingly flowing into India, the Indira Government groaned under the unbearable burden.

The ensuing chaos in East Pakistan and the influx of destitute refugees provided an opportunity to India to fish in troubled waters. Voicing the common feeling of the Hindu chauvinists A.B. Vajpayee, President Jan Sangh, who became Foreign Minister in Janata Government, told the general council of his party at Udaipur on July 4, 1971:

> It is true that Mujibur Rehman was once a member of the Muslim League and had a hand in creation of Pakistan. But if today he has realized that Partition was a mistake and two-nation theory is a myth and wants to bring about disintegration of Pakistan we should welcome this development and extend him all help to achieve his objective.

Jayaprakash Narayan, accepted as the best living interpreter of Gandhian nonviolence, was over excited and swept off his feet. He stole a march over the Jan Sangh leadership by insisting on despatch of Indian armies into East Pakistan

which he knew would lead to war. Inaugurating a conference in Patna on July 6, he unblushingly thundered: "The country, the Government and the people are unworthy if they are not prepared for a war". Ironically, Narayan was chairman of the Indo-Pakistan Reconciliation Board which claimed to strive for bringing the two countries closer in friendship. A resolution was passed by the Indian Parliament supporting the uprising in East Pakistan which clearly indicated the direction in which the country was moving.

The third Indo-Pak war broke out in December 1971. On December 5, a resolution was introduced in the Security Council calling upon India and Pakistan to stop fighting and withdraw their forces to their respective borders. The resolution was vetoed, under Indian pressure, by USSR. The issue was then taken to the General Assembly which adopted the resolution by 102 to 13 votes with 10 abstentions. Even all the Arab countries professedly friendly towards India, stood by Pakistan. The UN members believed that the turmoil in East Pakistan was an internal problem of Pakistan and India had no business to interfere in it. Never before had the world opinion been expressed so clearly on a dispute between two neighbouring countries. Yet India rejected the UN decision and continued to wage the war.

The Pakistani army could not stand the gigantic war machine of India. The local population of East Bengal was also hostile to the Pakistan Central Government dominated by West Pakistanis. Therefore, the Punjabi forces in Ea Pakistan, realizing their hopeless position, abjectly surrendered on December 16, 1971. It was a grand victory for India, for Indira Gandhi and, incidentally, for Ram Rajya. A new independent state of Bangladesh was born comprising the territory of erstwhile East Pakistan.

The utter rout and humiliation of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh enveloped Hindu India in euphoria. There was jubilation not because democracy had triumphed over brute force in a neighbouring land, but because the Islamic state carved out of the subcontinent had been disintegrated

by the might of Indian armies. Ever since independence dis membernment of Pakistan had never been abandoned as one of the aims of Hindu Nationalism. By achievng this aim Indira Gandhi excelled even her father in the esteem of the militant and chavinistic Hindus. She was regarded as super-human, an avatar, indeed Goddess Durga herself. The victory raised Indira's prestige sky-high. She became more charismatic than her father.

A few months later, with renewed emphasis on *garibi hatao* slogan she ordered general elections in a number of states and secured impressive victories. She was now in full, control of Indian politics and administration with all power she needed to change the destiny of the country.

For her indomitable courage, Hindu chauvinistic outlook, professed concern for have-nots and capacity to take prompt and firm decisions, Indira Gandhi endeared herself to the people; she became particularly popular among the youth and women. She had raised fresh hopes of deliverance from wretchedness in the minds of frustrated and dejected people. The Indian nation reposed complete faith in her leadership.

Her opportunity to introduce a social revolution had arrived; but she woefully missed to grasp it because she had no faith in it. She only wanted power to exercise and enjoy it.

In the fight against the "Syndicate", Indira Gandhi, unfortunately, chose either sycophants or pro-Russian Indian communists (CPI) and their fellow travellers within the Congress called "Young Turks" as her chief allies who took fullest advantage of the situation to gain positions in the Government and the party organisation. Imperceptibly, the leftists managed to surround her and became her chief consultants. Though she hotly contests it, she became a virtual prisoner in the hands of all sorts of charlatan advisers and no important measure was adopted or policy pronouncement made without their prior agreement. Her consultants became a class by themselves and significantly many of them were Brahmins.

With the legislative apparatus at her command, Indira

Gandhi took one step after another arbitrarily to run the administration and introduce changes in economy in disregard of the evil consequences she was timely warned against. Under communist inspiration she began to believe that nationalisation is a sine qua non for economic growth and for amelioration of the lot of poverty-sticken masses. If nationalization of one sector failed to produce the desired result, instead of pausing to rethink, she saw solution in nationalization of allied sectors. It certainly did not take India to the goal of a welfare state which the Congress had set before the country but to ever soaring prices, galloping corruption, growing unemployment and public groans. Strong criticism began to be voiced in the Press in which the traditions of outspokenness fostered by the British and Jawaharlal Nehru still prevailed. Reluctant to accept the follies committed by her, the Prime Minister attributed even honest though forthright criticism to malice of the newspaper-owning capitalist supporters of the erstwhile "Syndicate". "Newspapers are trumpets working for their masters", she repeatedly cried. She suggested that their ownership would be diffused and brought in a bill in the Lok Sabha to that effect.

Indira Gandhi's plans met with heavy weather. Riding rough shod over the Constitution, she nationalised, as already referred to, a number of banks and curtailed the privileges of the former princes which had been solemnly guaranteed to them when they yielded their domains. Some of the measures were turned down by the Supreme Court as ultra vires of the Constitution and violative of the clauses dealing with Fundamental Rights. She decided to get the clauses amended by the Parliament to enable her to act as she wished, but the Supreme Court in the famous Golaknath case held that Parliament was not entitled to do so. Her leftist colleagues then suggested that the Court may be packed with judges committed to the philosophy of the ruling party.

Indira Gandhi had arrived at a critical juncture in her career. Would she uphold the dignity and independence of the Judiciary as required in a genuine democracy or make it subservient to the executive?

In a democracy Judiciary is the watchdog of the people's rights and when it ceases to be independent and functions under the influence of the executive, democracy becomes lifeless and must degenerate into despotism and dictatorship. "The judge has not only to do justice between man and man", Winston Churchill has held, "he also—and this is one of the most important functions considered incomprehensible in some large parts of the world—has to do justice between the citizens and the State. He has to ensure that the administration conforms with the law and to adjudicate upon the legality of the exercise by the executive of its power."[1]

Since independence, the Supreme Court had fully cooperated with the Congress Government in upholding legislations and other orders which did not contravene the provisions of the Constitution. But if a law or a measure offended the Constitution, as was the case with violation of Fundamental Rights and arbitrary curtailment of princes' privileges, the Court was bound to reject it. J. Subha Rao, a former chief justice of India, describing the position explained:

> The judiciary gave real support to the legislature in its attempt to bring about a new social order where there will be justice, political, social and economic, in terms of the Directive Principles of the Constitution. But it prevented unconstitutional action by the legislature and the arbitrary action of the executive and directed them through the channels of democracy and the rule of law. For, under the Indian Constitution, means is as important as the end. Indeed, both are inseparable parts of the social changes. This judicial check the men in power do not like.[2]

Indira Gandhi and her leftist colleagues resented the restraints put on the Government as high handedness of the Supreme Court, They started a vilification campaign against the Judiciary and demanded that it should be committed to a "progressive philosophy", meaning thereby the ideology of the ruling Congress. "In no other democracy", regretted

1 Quoted by Palkhiwala in his article published in *Illustrated Weekly of India*, May, 13, 1973.

2 *The Statesman*, May 14, 1973.

N.A. Palkhiwala, "do ministers malign the courts regularly in public as in India. In no other democracy is there such persistent talk in the ruling party about a 'committed' judiciary."[1]

In April 1973, the Supreme Court reviewd its previous judgement on Golaknath case and by a majority verdict ruled that the citizen's fundamental rights and freedom, as laid down in the Constitution, could not only be amended but also abrogated by Parliament without altering its basic constitutional structure. A minority of judges, however, upheld the previous judgement. During the course of hearing of the case the Attorney General, appearing for the Union of India, expressly referred in open court, both orally and in writing, to the alternative of "political action" if the Supreme Court's ruling did not find favour with the Government.

Shortly after the fresh judgement was delivered, S.M. Sikri, the Chief Justice, retired from service, and according to 25-year old convention he should have been succeeded by the seniormost puisne-judge. But the next three members of the Bench in line of seniority—J.M. Shelat, K.S. Hegde and A.N. Grover—were among those who had subscribed to the minority judgement; they were superseded by their junior, A.N. Ray, who had supported the majority view favoured by the Government.

On April 25, Ray was appointed Chief Justice of India. The policy of having a committed judiciary was thought to have begun to operate. Indian Democracy was wounded. There were protests in all parts of the country. In an unprecedented action, thousands of advocates and lawyers boycotted courts and held meetings condemning the out-of-turn appointment of A.N. Ray. The executive committee of the Bar Association of India said in a resolution that "the action of the Government is a purely political one and has no relation whatsoever to the merits of the appointment. . . . The action clearly shows that the Government cannot tolerate or countenance an independent judiciary in India."

Presenting the Government's viewpoint, Minister Mohan

1 *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, May 13, 1973.

Kumaramangalam, denied in the Lok Sabha on May 2, the charge that the Government wanted to pack the Supreme Court with committed judges; nevertheless, he asserted that none could preside over the Supreme Court who did not appreciate the wind of change in the country. He claimed that it was Government's indisputable prerogative to take into account the social philosophy, politics and outlook of a man before appointing him for the highest post in the judiciary. What was more important, he emphasised, from the point of view of a Government keen to pursue progressive socio-economic reforms was "not the judicial integrity and legal experience of the person to be promoted as Chief Justice but his opinions which are known to the Government". In simple words, it meant that the highest judicial authority could be only a yes-man of the Government of the day.

In May, 1974, another case of supercession took place when Justice P.C. Pandit, seniormost judge of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, was passed over by his junior, R.S. Narula, who became chief justice. Pandit resigned. Once again the Supreme Court Bar Association protested and the Chandigarh lawyers stayed away from the courts for one day to express their resentment and anger. A distinguished advocate, Frank Anthony MP, warned in a public address that "once the judiciary loses its credibility through commitment, people will take to the streets instead of to the law courts for redressal of their grievances." He asserted that already a number of judges were competing with one another in jumping on the bandwagon of commitment "in the name of instant socialism."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Sprouting of Ram Rajya

For the first three years of Indira Gandhi's rule, India was without an economic plan. The third Five-Year Plan had ended on March 31, 1966, and the fourth Plan started in 1969. The interval came to be known as the period of "plan holiday". We have seen how fond Nehru was to give a socialistic turn to Indian economy. In the fourth Plan, the older objective of "a socialistic pattern of society" set by the first Prime Minister was interpreted as "the establishment of a social and economic democracy". The Planning Commission came out with the declaration that for planning in India "the basic goal is the rapid increase in the standard of living of the people" and "emphasis is placed on the common man, the weaker sections and the less privileged." The introduction to the Draft Plan explained: "The broad objectives of planning could thus be defined as rapid economic progress towards equality and social justice and the establishment of a social and economic democracy."

The fourth Plan met with heavy weather only two years after it was launched. Prices of goods began to rise rapidly and not all the projects planned could be completed for want of funds. Some of them had therefore to be dropped or curtailed. A distinction had to be made between the core sector of the Plan and the less important part of it. Characteristically, the planners decided that food, health and education did not fall within the core sector. The economy axe fell on social services and welfare needs of the common man, the heaviest blow invariably falling on the projects calculated to help poorer classes. For example, there was 100 crore shortfall in education; it affected the spread of primary and middle level education by reducing the number of new schools proposed to

be opened in rural areas of the country. The facilities at university stage outstripped the plan target. The same happened in the case of health; neglect was pronounced in primary health centres and rural health services, as also in national smallpox and malaria eradication programmes with harmful consequences for the health of the low income groups who attend these centres for medical aid. In 1971, a facile and naive scheme called Minimum Needs Programme was sketched to wipe off the tears of the downtrodden but was soon abandoned never to be heard of again; the scheme was declared as impracticable and wound up.

No one with progressive ideas can entertain any doubt that India's economic policies should have a radical orientation if they are to serve the toiling, teeming masses but what has actually happened all along under the Ram Rajya is that the policies are only pseudo-radical, the sole aim being to burnish by sheer propaganda the image of the ruling party. "Radical rhetoric has become an affection," wrote B.G. Verghese, then Editor *Hindustan Times*, "a game, another gimmick, a promise of jam tomorrow even while inflation, corruption and economic stagnation are taking the bread out of people's mouths today"[1].

What happened to the new approach of the fourth Plan? Dr. D.S. Minhas, member Planning Commission in 1973, posed the question and himself answered: "We are reaping a rich harvest of gains in terms of galloping inflation, food riots, general unrest and serious breakdowns of law and order in many parts of the Republic."

The fifth Five-year Plan was launched in early 1974. Dr. Minhas who, unsuccessfully fought against romanticism in economic field was compelled to observe, after relinquishing the job in March 1973, that the fifth Plan was "a bunkum of paper objectives" and that both the aims of removal of poverty and the goal of self-reliance were taking a cruel beating".[2]

Nehru started the myth that socialist pattern of economy is the most effective method of achieving prosperity. Private

[1] *The Imprint*, June 1974.

[2] *The Statesman*, April 22, 1974.

adventure in the field of production was not expressly opposed but got close-fisted encouragement. The mixed economy was the slogan. Borrowing astronominal sums from obliging, developed nations of the West, chiefly USA, the Nehru Government recklessly spent on projects in public sector. During seven years (1950-1957) India received from abroad a total of 1,325 million dollars in loans and grants. For the next two years, 1958 and 1959, America alone gave her a total of 611.7 million dollars. But while individual entrepreneurs were taking strides and the private sector was flourishing the public sector languished and showed a colossal loss.

On August 15, 1947, when India achicved independence there was no foreign debt. According to a statement made by Finance Minister, Y.B. Chavan, at the commencement of the first Plan on December 14, 1953, we had incurred a debt of Rs. 19.66 crores. By the beginning of the second Plan it had risen to Rs. 117.74 crores and when we started the third Plan it was Rs. 864.31 crores. The debt went up to the figure of Rs. 6,849.62 crores when the fourth Plan was put into operation. On October 31, 1973, when the fifth Plan was being considered the debt liability, including PL 480 funds, amounted to Rs. 9008.12 crores.

Early in 1974, the American Government, as a gesture of friendliness, took a unique step in the annals of diplomatic relationship between two states, by signing an agreement with India foregoing the major part of the amount that had accumulated under PL 480. Mr. Moynihan, US Ambassador, handed over a cheque for Rs. 1664 crores to the Indian Government symbolizing the transfer of the sum as grant to this country. Yet the outstanding liability to that country stood at s Rs. 2561.95 crores on April 1, 1974. In total, India had to pay a debt of no less than Rs. 7347.12 crores to other nations.

We had already paid, till 1974, according to the then Finance Minister's statement an interest of Rs. 1689 crores on the debt. A further interest of Rs. 1978 crores, it was stated, would become payable by 1979-80.

Side by side with incurring huge loans, the Congress

Government had been resorting to deficit financing to implement the Plans. Deficit financing which was Rs. 359 crores in 1970-71 jumped upto Rs. 710 crores in 1971-72 and Rs. 848 crores in 1972-73. Such reckless policy of financing schemes caused high inflation and produced an adverse impact on the price stuation.

In the name of self-reliance, Minhas apprehended, India might become perpetually dependent on foreigners "the benevolent ones and the malevolent ones. In regard to foreign aid the country was being placed in the same position as the peasants who borrowed money from lenders and were never able to get out of their clutches."[1]

The Indian economists, other than the eulogists of Congress rule, were generally of opinion that the condition of poorer classes had worsened after independence, while the rich had grown richer the poor had become poorer. According to the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry which made a study of poverty at the end of 1969, "out of the total population of 529.5 million, 218.3 million that is 41.2 per cent lived below the poverty line."[2]

Mohan Dharia, Minister of State for Planning, admitted in the Lok Sabha on April 18, 1973, that there were about 37 million people in the country in 1968-69 whose daily consumption was 60 paise or less per head.[3]

Dr. B.S. Minhas has stated in his book *Planning and the Poor* that the proportion of people below the poverty line "may well be nearer two-thirds (66 per cent) rather than the estimated two-fifths (40 per cent) in 1967-68."

Drawing a gloomy picture of things he said in a pessimistic tone: "Given the present conditions, it will make far more sense if the planners can assure the nation that the proportion of people below the poverty line in 1978-79 will be no more than what it was in 1967-68.[4]

While estimating the income of the poverty-stricken

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[1] *The Statesman*, April 21, 1974.
[2] *P.T.I. Report*, October 15, 1972.
[3] *The Indian Express*, April 19, 1973.
[4] *The Indian Express*, June 25, 1974.

classes one must keep in view the dwindling purchasing power of the currency. A Rupee was worth 99 paise in 1950, 80.6 paise in 1960 and 44.6 paise in 1970. It came down to 43 paise in the next two years and became 35 paise by June 1974.[1] "India has been living," noted Ronald Segal concluding his survey of economic situation in this country, "too long on a ledge of economic precipice frightened both to climb and to fall. But the ground is crumbling beneath her, and if she does not begin speedily to grope her way upwards she must soon fall below."[2]

Addressing a public meeting in New Delhi on April 15, 1973, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi confessed that the country was faced with a grave economic crisis. "The problem", she declared, "was bigger than India's struggle for freedom".[3] Seven months later, on November 18, the general secretary of the Congress, Chandrajit Yadav, admitted in a speech at Gwalior that "the *garibi hatao* programme had not made headway and the people were experiencing acute economic distress owing to shortage of all essential items."[4]

There was widespread unemployment among both the illiterate and the educated. It was stated in the Rajya Sabha on March 1, 1974, that the number of educated job-seekers in the country had risen from 20.53 lakhs in June 1971 to 35.25 lakhs in June 1973.

An analysis of the 1971 census data revealed that there were nearly thirteen million males without work in the age-group 20-59 which is the normal age-group of the working people.

According to the available statistics in 1974, in the capital city of Delhi alone 194981 persons were unemployed in 1973 of whom nearly 11000 had post-graduate degrees and more than 22,000 were graduates; of these, 5253 post-graduates

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1 *Ibid.*, June 5, 1974.
2 *The Crisis of India*, p. 227.
3 *The Indian Express*, April 15, 1973.
4 *Ibid.*, November 19, 1973.

and 7178 graduates were women.[1]

Thousands of engineers and technicians were idle and the Government was at its wit's end what to do with them. On the one hand there was loud lamentation that brain drain was increasing, talented youth were going abroad to seek fortunes and this process needed to be stopped, on the other it was reported that no fewer than 109,303 scientists (99,189 graduates and 10,114 post-graduates) were lying idle because no suitable jobs were available to employ them. No wonder, and no regret, that a gifted scientist like Dr. Hargobind Khurana who failed to secure a suitable job in his homeland was welcomed in the United States where his valuable researches in bio-chemistry of genes were widely acclaimed and crowned with the award of the coveted Nobel Prize in 1973.

Concluding their survey of the economic situation in the country in 1973, the UNI remarked: "The year 1973 passed into history as a dismal year of backbreaking prices, severe food famine, acute shortage of essential commodities, galloping inflation, mounting unemployment and virtual economic stagnation."

1973 proved to be a very bad year, indeed. The wholesale prices hit all time high, an increase of 24.1 per cent; retail prices went up by over 40 per cent and in some items as high as 60 per cent. In the case of foodgrains the increase was 22.3 per cent, the worst affected being edible oils group which recorded an increase of over 40 per cent. What caused deep distress to poorer sections was acute shortage of basic necessities of life, especially the foodgrains.

To meet the situation, the Central Government adopted the stupid measure of taking over the wholesale trade in wheat in 1973 when the administrative machinery was wholly unprepared to efficiently shoulder the burden of monopolisation of collection and distribution. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ridiculed the warning of saner economists that the step would only aggravate the problem of food shortages leading to large scale hoarding and profiteering.

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[1] *The Indian Express*, May 28, 1974.

Undeterred, the Government pushed ahead with its plan. As expected, it soon proved a miserable failure and the worst forebodings came true; wheat went underground and whatever produce the Government was able to procure could not be properly distributed partly due to inexperience and inefficiency but mostly due to corruption. At many places ration shops had no grains to supply to the needy people. Ironically, those very people profited by the arrangement whom the Congress leaders intended to hit and the poorer classes suffered the most. The situation became so desperate that protest demonstrations and food riots occurred in many parts of the country.

In Gujarat, in the beginning of 1974, students organizing under a newly-formed Navanirman Yuvak Samiti, revolted against the Government for failing to provide rations to the people and for corruption in the administration. For more than a month an incessant fight took place between the agitators and the guardians of law and order. The whole State had risen like the proverbial one man. Curfew was clamped on Ahmedabad, Baroda and over a dozen other towns. When it failed to quell the disturbances, the army was called out to deal with the situation. Hardly a day passed in February when police did not resort to firing sometimes at several places and more than once on the same day. According to official estimates no fewer than 92 persons succumbed to the police bullets. Even after the Congress Government bowed out of office and President's rule was imposed on the State, the violent demonstrations and rioting did not abate for many more days.

Then the Congress Government realized its folly and in March the order of taking over wholesale wheat trade in Delhi was withdrawn. Admitting the failure of take over, Mrs. Gandhi in a speech on April 7, 1974, in Hyderabad, confessed that "it is not possible to undertake such a tremendous thing". Hurriedly, a new policy was conceived and promulgated before its implications were closely examined. It was not at all kept in view that over the years wheat had become an important determinant of economic stability. Now the pendulum of food policy went to the other extreme. Bowing before the

wholesale traders, the Government allowed them to freely purchase wheat from producers on the condition that 50 per cent of it would be handed over to the Government. The purchase price was raised from Rs. 76 to Rs. 105 and sale price to Rs. 125 per quintal. The new policy did not fare better; neither did the Government succeed in procuring adequate quantity of wheat for buffer stock nor did the price in open market stay at Rs. 125 per quintal; it rose to 200 and even above.

The wholesale dealers evaded the payment of 50 per cent levy on wheat they bought from farmers in grain mandis. Most of the sales were not registered and both the purchase and sale prices went on rising and, in May, wheat was sold in the open (or black) market at Rs. 225 per quintal because the Government failed to control the price for want of adequate stocks to distribute through ration shops. While the suffering of poor consumers became acuter with every shift in food policy, the unscrupulous traders made hay under the sun of mismanagement. A dealer told the *Indian Express* correspondent on May 31, that "he had never earned such a huge profit all his life as during the last 15 weeks."

It is hardly surprising that under Congress regime unscrupulous businessmen contrived to amass unaccounted money by tons on which they paid no taxes yet managed to invest it in purchasing property and expansion of trade, commerce and business. According to Morarji Desai, former Finance Minister, "from Rs 5,000 crores in 1969 the black money in circulation had gone upto Rs 11,000 crores in 1974, resulting in abnormal price rise."[1] A competing black economy running parallel to national economy, thrived contributing to soaring prices and shortages. The Government appeared helpless or unwilling to abolish or even control the black market.

When economy of a country stagnates social decay is not far off. Fall in per capita income and steep rise in

[1] *The Indian Express*, June 19, 1974.

prices of foodgrains and other consumer commodities led to deterioration in living conditions. Malnutrition made the people prone to disease and early death. According to World Health Organisation India accounted for 83 per cent of small pox cases in the world in 1973. In Bihar and Eastern UP the disease spread in epidemic form in early 1974 and claimed a toll of 30,000 lives; hundreds were blinded and maimed by the scourage. The socialist weekly, *Janata*, explaining the typical Hindu attitude wrote: "The death of thirty thousand people in a single state like Bihar might have shocked the conscience of the world. WHO might have pointed an accusing finger at Bihar as an epicentre of this dread disease but we as a nation are not going to be unduly exercised over it. . . why should any one lose his sleep because of it. One god gives us children, the other god takes them away and there is precious little we mortals can do to check the divine cycle of life and death."[1] Sarcastic though these remarks are, they reflect the real thinking of the believers in Ram Rajya.

A major setback has been suffered by Indian scientists in their war against tropical epidemics like malaria, cholera, and leprosy; these diseases now threaten to strike back with a vengeance. Dr. G. Gopalan, Director-General of the Indian Council of Medical Research, warned on July 10, 1974, that the epidemics would pose a grave challenge to health authorities in the next five years. He revealed that "there had been a dramatic revival of malaria with as many as one million cases reported during 1972-73."[2] Falling death rate boastfully flaunted as indication of progress in national health has been arrested. Between 1969-72 the death rate went up from 14 to 16.9 per thousand persons.

In 1961, at a historic joint session of the two Houses of Parliament the Dowry Prohibition Act was passed forbidding the practice. After making a comprehensive survey in all parts of the country, the *Express News Service* stated on May 25,

[1] *The Janata*, July 21, 1974.

[2] *The Indian Express*, July 13, 1974.

1976, that "despite laws and Government rules forbidding the giving and taking of dowry, reports from the States indicate that the system of buying and selling bridegrooms to the highest bidder continues to flourish."

The News Service elaborated:

> The price of an eligible Indian groom is determined by his profession, income, caste and family background. IAS and IPS officers top the list of eligible and on an average command the highest price, from upto Rs 5 lakhs in Karnataka to Rs one lakh in most other States . . . Professional preferences are generally modified by caste considerations . . . In general these rates are inflated or modified according to the 'derects' or 'accomplishments' of the prospective bride. In Karnataka, for example, the girl is subjected to intense scrutiny (which includes a voice and an eye test) before the groom names his price."

The *News Service* report continued:

> Dowry requirements appear to be uniform and it is generally given in cash as well as in the form of furniture,—air conditioners, refrigerators, television sets, household equipment, cars, scooters and cycles—depending on the grooms qualifications.
> Reports from the States indicate that although elaborate laws prohibiting dowry have been passed they are almost impossible to implement. Indeed, it is an irony that government officers should be the worst offenders in this respect by virtue of their 'market price' despite Civil Service Conduct Rules which declare that it is illegal.

Stressing that the legislation has proved ineffective the *News Service* report concluded:

> The only noticeable difference is that dowry is now given with the minimum of publicity and detailed facts and figures are concealed.[1]

Even highly educated girls equipped with professional training such as doctors, engineers, architects, teachers and others earning decent salaries do not find suitable husbands unless substantial dowry is forthcoming. Hindu girls are

[1] *Ibid.*, May 26, 1975.

given away as *dan* (offering) by parents in a Vedic ceremony; therefore, there is no question of the wedding partners being considered as equals or living as equals throughout life. The woman Prime Minister paid little attention to enforce the laws or raise the social status of girls. She only exploited the fair sex to attain her personal ends at the time of elections.

Even after three decades of freedom and self rule, (swaraja), the degrading institution of *devadasis* (slaves of gods), girls dedicated to temples, is alive. When Dr. Baba Judhav, chairman of the Mahatma Jyotibha Phule Samata Pratisthan, met the chief minister of Maharashtra on September 29, 1975, to nararte the woes of the abused women, he revealed that4,000 to 5,000 girls were every year dedicated as *devadasis* to the temple on Margashirsha Paurnima to live as virtual prostitutes. He said that the total number of *devadasis* in South Maharashtra alone could be about two and half lakhs. The institution had to be preserved so that the goddess Vellamma is not displeased.[1] Four elderly but disabused *devadasis* pleaded with Press representatives in Poona: "Now our life is all frustration. But do something for our daughters who have no father to mention in schools and are supposed to follow the same path as their mothers"[2].

While thus social conditions were fast deteriorating India lost a great revolutionary, a friend of poverty-stricken backward classes, untouchables and women for whom he fought valiantly. He was a gallant warrior from the South and earned unrivalled fame as a great hero of hundred battle against orthodoxy and obscurantism.

The redoubtable E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (1879-1973) launched a strong movement in the twenties to destroy religious mode of thought in South India, particularly Tamil Nadu. Naicker had very little formal education but early in life he imbibed liberal views and had hankering for social

[1] *The Indian Express*, September 30, 1975.
[2] *Ibid.*, September 30, 1975.

justice, He engaged himself as a fighter against evils in Hindu society. His courage and reformist zeal were appreciated by disinherited and stricken classes. In 1919, he joined Gandhi's non co-operation movement and courted imprisonment ; but he was soon disillusioned and turned to be one of the bitterest critics of Gandhian philosophy. Experience taught him that Congressmen were not opposed to untouchability which he loathed and wanted to uproot.

Naicker launced Self Respect Movement, its object being to end the oppression of low caste Hindus by conceited Brahmins. Step by step he became a rationalist-materialist and an inveterate critic of Hindu social system. He freely gave expression to his atheistic views and heretic beliefs. At one time he organised an intensive compaign against "the tyranny of deism" and repeatedly broke images of Hindu gods and goddesses.

Uncompromising in his views,Ramaswami Naicker swam against the powerful current of Hindu nationalism and the struggles launched by Gandhi against the British rule. He founded Dravida Munetra Kazgham (D.M.K.) which soon became a powerful political force in Tamil Nadu. He opposed the Indian Constitution on the ground that it was advantageous to upper classes and instrumental in strengthening the Brahmin hold. In the fifties, he vigorously demanded cession of the Dravida South from Aryan North.

Affectionately called Periyar, Ramaswami Naicker commanded respect of the common people and every shade of political opinion. President Giri called him "a colourful leader" and "always a fighter." Prime Minister Indira Gandhi described him as "one who revelled in controversy" and "challenged many accepted notions."

When Naicker died on December 24, 1973, at the venerable age of 92 there was mourning in the South; hundreds wept and gloom descended on progressive sections of the Indians. The Tamil Nadu state government ordered a two-day public mourning and closure of all government offices and educational institutions. The funeral took place with full police honours. In recognition of the lifelong work he

did for the growth of rational thought and secular morality, life size statues of Naicker have been erected in different cities of Tamil Nadu with legends like "God does not exist at all", "He who worships God is a barbarian."

Naicker was a force to be reckoned with by the advocates of Ram Rajya. Though in his death rationalism suffered a grievous loss the flag of social revolution he raised has remained fluttering and his ideas and works have continued to inspire millions in the South.

With mounting resentment against widespread corruption, creeping inefficiency, and high priced commodities, Indira Gandhi went about the country claiming to have led the people on road to progress and prosperity. Addressing Congress workers in Hyderabad on April 7, 1974, she exclaimed: "Not a single country of our size has achieved what we have achieved in any time of the history."

The failure to raise the standard of life or in other words to remove poverty, pales into insignificance when we consider the decline in moral standard of the Indians in post-independence period. Unprecedented corruption to amass wealth by any means, fair or foul, disgraceful scramble for political power, loss of fellow feeling, disregard for human personality, revival of atrocious rituals and base superstitions, ever-growing number of cheats, swindlers and hypocrites posing as godmen became the main characteristics of contemporary Indian life. "There is a crisis of character today", despairingly admitted President Giri in an interview, "and there is a growing divergence between what we say and what we do; Dishonesty and corruption are on the increase." Ram Rajya had begun to sprout.

With the decline of the British power in the forties during the Second World War corruption started both in Indian social life and in the government services as to become a notable feature. In 1945, Jawaharlal Nehru found it intolerable saying that black marketeers and profiteers were flourishing at the cost of the nation and that all such criminals would be hanged from the nearest lamp-post when the country

became free. After the British left India, corruption became an endemic disease. President Rajendra Prasad could not help drawing attention of Nehru urging him to take drastic steps to crush the evil. Amazingly, Nehru, now the all-powerful Prime Minister of free India, felt offended at the note and told the President that it was "unfriendly"[1].

In December 1964, Finance Minister T.T. Krishnamachari assured the country that he would get very near mastering the problem of black money within a couple of years. He was far from doing so when he relinquished office. Another Congress braggart, Gulzarilal Nanda, taking over as Home Minister, pledged that he would end corruption in services in two years or resign the ministership. Neither of the two things happened and when finally he had to quit for different reasons many years later, corruption had risen to new heights.

A measure of moral degeneration was the widespread adulteration of consumer goods. especially foodstuffs and drugs, by manufacturers and traders who mint money without any scruples, at the cost of public health. There was hardly any foodstuff available in the market which was unadulterated. A survey conducted by the Consumer Council of India showed that cold beverages, wheat flour, cosmetics, drugs, eatables, spices, vanaspati and liquor were among the items adulterated. The culprits were not afraid of being prosecuted as they were reportedly hand in glove with the enforcement department.

A form of corruption in the trading class is underweighing. According to a report of the Consumer Council the money that dishonest traders make annually by using outmoded scales and fraudulent forms of measurement was round about Rs. 3,000 crores. The short-measuring is resorted to practically in everything from vegetables to cloth.[2]

Broadly speaking Brahmin scriptures do not forbid resort to violence, corruption or immoral means for achieving

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1 *The Indian Express*, March 2, 1974.

2 *Ibid.* June 4, 1974.

wordly aims, even avatars and sages are said to have taken recourse to murder, dupery, falsehood and cheating when need for them arose to fulfil a desire. The *Ramayana* is full of such instances from cover to cover. Little wonder these hateful practices are rampant in contemporary society in free India where *the Ramcharitmanas* is a very popular holy book.

Gandhiji, consciously and painstakingly, fostered a spirit of law-breaking for nearly three decades. His satyagraha agitations invariably led to holiganism, vulgarity, violence and bloodshed. But hatred of foreign rule coupled with Gandhiji's magnetic influence over the masses made law-breaking respectable and laudable. Those who dared to hold contrary views and displayed solicitude for law and order in society, even under the British, were looked down upon as renegades. Nehru called them quislings and traitors in *The Discovery of India*. A generation grew which believed that law-breaking was the hall mark of courage, patriotism and love of liberty. Real friends of India and farsighted statesmen warned Congress leaders that admiration of law-breakers and encouragement of illegal strikes and hooliganism were bound to create difficulties in the days to come but Congress fanatics were in no mood to listen. During the days of negotiations with the Cabinet Mission, in May 1946, Nehru asked Lord Wavell to grant certain demands of railwaymen who had threatened to go on strike. As the demands were unreasonable, the Viceroy replied: "It is easy enough to buy off railwaymen temporarily but it would leave a legacy of a great embarrassment for a new (National) Government."[1] The darling hero of Hindu nationalism was the last man to listen to such sane advice. Now it had begun to boomerang under the Congress rule.

There have not been more satyagraha movements in the subcontinent during the British rule than in India since independence. Political parties, trade unions, religious

[1] *Wavell : The Viceroy's Journal*, p. 259.

communities, linguistic groups, government employees, students, businessmen and innumerable other bodies of people and even individuals all over the country have from time to time deliberately overstepped the boundaries of law in order to bring pressure on the Government to get their grievances, real or fancied, redressed. Cat-call strikes became in the seventies the order of the day. On November 11, 1973, addressing the Congress Parliamentary Party, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi said that while "the current economic situation was no less serious than a war-time emergency" yet "the workers resorted to strikes on flimsy grounds." Three days later, on November 14, in a message launching the fifth Plan Week she appealed to the "good sense and patriotism of workers, farmers, government employees, businessmen and others to consider the issues affecting them in the wider national perspective." Spotlighting the growing economic crisis in the country she said despondingly on November 17 that she did not know when it would end.

In April 1974, the Railwaymen's unions served notices to the authorities that if their various demands were not met the entire railway network would stop functioning on May 8. Negotiations between union leaders and Railway Ministry having broken down, the threat materialised.

The Government might have yielded to the demands after the strike was launched, but this time the harassed public opposed the strike which encouraged the authorities to put their foot down; the strike fizzled out within a fortnight or so. Yet much mischief had already been done. According to PTI preliminary estimates the Railway lost Rs. 50 crores in traffic earnings and the economy more than 500 crores in the 20 days of the strike. Worse still, the prices of several consumer commodities rose by 20 per cent during the period.

Nevertheless. the strikes and the satyagrahas continued unabated with the inevitable consequences of decreasing production and increasing prices, shortages and lawlessness. Not infrequently an agitation was accompanied by violence. Those in charge of law and order had to use force, make baton charges, explode teargas shells or open fire to bring the unruly

crowds under control. It was computed by reliable publicists that the British Government did not resort to firing so often as the Congress Government did during the post-independence period and that more people were killed within the quarter centurary by police guns than were destroyed by fire arms in suppressing the civil commotions during the entire period of British rule. Why is this so ? "When fifteen million peasants quietly petition," answered Ronald Segal "the Congress leadership cannot hear, and when fifteen hundred rioters loot shops and fire trams it stirs to respond. Thus, when it should attend it ignores, when it should resist it succumbs."[1]

Burning of buses and public property such as government buildings, railway stations or post offices were no rarities. "Agitation has undoubtedly become a way of life in this country", bewailed the *Indian Express* in November 1972. "But are we equally aware of the fact that agitation is increasingly accompanied by violence, and that violence is gradually replacing all other means of expressing dissent and resentment. This is not democracy, not even just mobocracy. It is the beginning of anarchy."[2] Frank Moraes put the situation this way : "There is a government in India but there seems to be no administration. The rule of law is accompanied by the reign of disorder."[3]

A severe indictment of the administrative apparatus in the country was made by the All-India Confederation of Central Government Officers Association by exposing "prevarication and suppression of truth in the matter of national importance at a time of crisis." In a statement the Federation said that "there has been significant deterioration in the law and order situation, a general sense of insecurity is growing, attacks on women are perpetrated with impunity, the public distribution system is in great danger of collapsing, prices rise unchecked, land records are in chaotic state and the drudgery and the poverty of people is deepening."[4]

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1 *The Crisis of India*, p. 244.

2 *The Indian Express*, November 17, 1972.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *The Statesman*, New Delhi, July 7, 1973.

Hardly a week passed by in 1973-74 when a violent riot involving life and destruction of property and killing by police firing were not reported on the front pages of daily papers.

The unhealthy trends could have been changed by dissemination of true knowledge and spread of scientific rational culture. No doubt the amounts spent on education were enormous and schools and colleges had been started in the remotest corners of the country to bring light to the people. But in 1974 twenty-seven years after independence seventy per cent of the population was still illiterate. Evidently it was the upper class fringe that had profited by the expansion of education who had manipulated to keep the disinherited away from the centres of light. For the promotion of democratic outlook the logical next step from mass electorate should have been to mass education as was clearly indicated in the Directive Principles of the Constitution. But women, peasants, labouring classes, shudras and untouchables though enfranchised had been hindered from getting education and easily fooled under the Congress rule.

And this was not all. If we just go through the text books taught in the schools especially in the lower classes, we can well realize why the outlook of Indians does not change. The text books are full of irrational ideas, superstitions, dogmas, pauranic beliefs and Brahmin lies which are supposed to be part of Indian culture and civilisation. *Ramcharitmanas* is the ideal of the Indian text-book producers.

Dr. Bishambar Nath Pande, Director of the Institute of Indological Research and Chairman of the History Committee covering all universities in Uttar Pradesh, is of the opinion that falsification and distortion of history is an ancient art which has poisoned the minds of many generations of Indians. It is, he says, still practised by the majority of our modern historians and text-book writers. The result is "perpetual communal misunderstanding and distrust which often lead to violence."[1]

[1] *The Times of India*, June 29, 1976.

When, in 1966, attention of the Union Government was drawn to this vital matter, a committee with, among others, K. G. Saiyidain, J. P. Naik and Gopinath Aman, as its members, was formed to report on the education imparted in the schools. After going through the available data, the committee found that (a) the books were overweighed with Hindu mythology, (b) most of the prose as well as poetry selections in text-books are prayers to Hindu deities, (c) Hindu mythological beliefs are presented in a manner as if they are universally held by all Indians, (d) historical personalities belonging to other eligious groups are neglected, and (e) historical events are presented in such a manner as to arouse and perpetuate prejudices against certain religious groups.[1] The committee's findings and recommendations were considered but ultimately treated with scant regard and the contents of text-books continue to be as they were before.

The spirit of Hindu nationalism is sedulosly fostered and the cult of heroworship implanted in student's mind. Premium is placed on national conceit, vanity and intolerance.

There never has been any serious endeavour to inculcate rational beliefs, democratic ideas or humanist ideals in the minds of students. When the rulers themselves are swayed by absurd notions and superstitions which they believe to be a part of Indian culture, how could it be otherwise? For example it is no secret that the national leaders repose faith in astrology, and most of the ministers at the Centre and in the states act only on the advice of paid soothsayers maintained by them. Public functions were and are held not when it is convenient to all concerned but on auspicious days and at auspicious hour fixed by the astrologers; even travels are undertaken by State dignitaries according to reported propitious position of the stars.

Nehru bowed to astrologers on August 15, 1947. No one could therefore blame smaller men when they follow in his footsteps. Faithfully emulating their leaders the common people who are notorious for lack of self-confidence, look to

[1] Moin Shakir : *Islam in India*, p. 22.

astrologers for succour in distress.

"India is ruled by a band of astrologers", observed a special correspondent of the *Hindustan Times*, "and if there is one single tribe which has thrived in post-independence Delhi it is that of the fortune-tellers"[1]

It became a practice with Congress leaders to initiate public projects and plans with religious ceremonies where scriptures were recited and Vedic rituals held.

In order to demonstrate that Hindu rule was restored in India after a thousand years of *malechha* occupation. the "secularist" Congress leaders decided to renovate temples demolished by Muslim conquerors and also to build new ones. On November 13, 1947, Sardar Patel took a vow not to rest until the Somnath temple in Gujarat, destroyed in 1024 A.D. by Mahmud Ghazni, was reconstructed. The machinery of the Secular State was utilised for the purpose. On May 11, 1951, amidst chanting of Vedic hymns, Rajendra Prasad, first President of India, installed jyotilinga (Hindu Idol) in the Somnath temple, thus laying a tradition for his successors to follow. Consequently there has been a spurt of religious activities and enormous increase in the wealth of the Hindu temples. The annual income of Tirupati Devasthanam is as high as Rs. 9,18,30,00.

In a country where millions of people go to sleep at night with empty stomach, foodstuffs and *ghee* (clarified butter) worth crores of rupees are burned as sacrifice to please and propitiate lifeless gods. The Manager of the Andhra Pradesh Dairy Development Corporation revealed on July 26, 1975, that out of 1800 tonnes of ghee produced annually no less than 360 tonnes were consumed at Venkateshwara temple at Tirumalai for religious purposes.

It is not entirely a coincidence that drowned in a sea of vexing problems, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi should have betrayed spiritual and intellectual infirmity from which she was unknown to have suffered previously. Following in the

[1] *The Hindustan Times*, August, 2, 1973.

footsteps of her father when he was placed in similar circumstances, she sought "spiritual" crutches from Anandmyee Maa who endowed her with a *rudraksha mala* (string of sanctified beads) by wearing which, she was assured, even worst trouble could be warded off.

Whenever small successes attended on Mrs. Gandhi's policies and endeavours she attributed these to her faith in shrines and godmen. Nevertheless, her failures went on mounting and, at times, appeared overwhelming.

With the rejuvenation of Brahminsm in social and political life of India, the evils which had been eradicated by the British rulers again raised their ugly heads. Maladministration, disorder, insecurity, thuggee, highway robbery, dacoity, assault on women and callousness in general were some of them.

Encouraged by religious fanatics and approved by orthodox Hindu opinion the savage rite of *sati* revived in certain parts of Free India. From time to time the more dreadful cases were reported in the Press without causing even a ripple of horror, pity or remorse in the admirers of Ram Rajya. On February 25, 1974, a grief-stricken Rajput woman was thrown on the burning pyre of her dead husband at Surapura village 90 km from Sikar in Rajasthan. Much preparation must have been made prior to the performance of the horrible rite, as no fewer than ten thousand people from the nearby town of Nimkantha and neighbouring villages were present to witness the immolation. Not even a single spectator protested against the inhuman act or tried to save the unfortunate victim of religious frenzy. The police too took no notice while the preparations were in progress and arrived at the spot one hour after the unfortunate young damsel had been reduced to ashes. Reporting the event, the *Times of India* revealed : "this is the fourth case of sati in the Nimkantha area in the past ten months."[1]

[1] *The Times of India*, March 1, 1974.

If the evil of sati is not as prevalent today as it was two centuries ago, Hindu orthodoxy has invented a new cruel practice to destroy women. In an official annual report on births and deaths in the Delhi State (population about 6 million) it is revealed that nearly 350 women in the age group of 15 to 24 died of burns in 1975. They either committed suicide or were consigned to flames by husbands or their relatives because women's parents were unable to give them adequate dowry at the time of marriage.

Commenting on this new horrible practice in its issue of December 22, 1976, the *Indian Express* wrote : "This is more monstrous crime than even forced sati. But nobody seems to lose sleep over this happening so frequently more than a century after the abolition of the immolation of widows. . .The fact is that dowry continues to be a homicidal evil in Indian society."[1]

From time to time Indian Press reports cases of human sacrifice, some of them shuddering. The gruesome murders are committed to appease Hindu deities like Kali, Bhairavi and Durga. "Paras Ram of Dina Nagar village in Gurdaspur district offered his own child as a sacrifice to propitiate some blood-thirsty god to remove the curse of still-births in his family. While his two sisters held the legs of the boy, aged four and half years, Paras Ram beheaded him. After hacking the body to pieces it was cooked and eaten by the offenders in the belief that the child would be reborn in the family."[2]

Thus sprouted Ram Rajya under the fostering wings of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in the early seventies of the twentieth century.

[1] *The Indian Express*, December 22, 1976.
[2] *The Hindustan Times*, October 10, 1973.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Nuclear Power for What?

To an observer from abroad, India's condition in 1974 appeared serious and dismal. Writing editorially on February 22, 1974, the *New York Times* expressed the fear that "India, under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, is in danger of political and social disintegration." The *Times* said only two years ago, Mrs. Gandhi's popularty had gained new heights, surpassing even that enjoyed by her father. "After India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 War, the Congress party had scored stunning victories in state elections across the country, routing a divided and dispirited Opposition. Her triumph raised effusive hopes that India would enjoy a new era of progress under strong, united leadership." But, *the New York Times* went on "not surprisingly, given India's massive problems of overpopulation, under-development and abysmal poverty the hopes have not been fulfilled." Another well-known periodical, *Wall Street Journal*, pessimistically commented: "For India, this is a year of crushing world price pressures, shattered economic plans, rampant inflation, stagnant productivity, and, most alarming of all, growing fears of approaching widespread hunger."[1]

The fact of the matter was that our superb Constitution, dazzling plans, lofty objectives notwithstanding, we had no social policy, no foreign policy and no political policy. What the leaders gave the country was slogans and yet more slogans which they thought would carry the day with the gullible people.

"Slogans have come to rule", despairingly remarked B.G. Verghese, "worthwhile ideas have been pre-empted in

[1] *Wall Street Journal*, April 16, 1974.

new slogans and discredited by being caricatured in projection or aborted in execution . . . Every new slogan has been sought to be clothed with respectability by giving it a pseudo-radical look. And so the competition in 'radicalism'; each new slogan being more 'radical' than the other to mask the preceding failure of implemention, each one less credible than the other because of lack of underlying will, purpose, preparation and organisation to carry it through."[1]

In such straitened circumstances, when on May 18, 1974, India exploded a nuclear device the world was taken aback. Though the common man was momentarily dazzled, he could not forget the unprecedented economic depression. The Hindu nationalists felt thrilled and exhilarated, hailing the event as a "glorious feat" and "a gigantic stride". Some friends of India abroad in Afro-Asian lands and as far away as South America admired the achievement. "A nation harassed by massive economic problem", said the *Straits Times* of Singapore, "and remembering its humiliating defeat by China in 1962 must now walk taller". Even the opposition leaders were temporarily silenced in criticism of Indira Gandhi. There was euphoria all over the country and those few who refused to share it were called cynics if not traitors.

The experiment provoked criticism on many scores, the important one being the colossal expenditure on it when India, passing through the ugliest economic crisis, could ill-afford it. Blinded by a sense of national pride and prestige, leading journals joined the chorus of nationalist leaders in praise of the achievement but fearless critics were not totally absent. Typical among them was a thoughtful weekly of Delhi which admitting that "most Indians feel happy and proud" added sarcastically : "If the explosion did not bring down prices of consumer goods and failed to increase production of goods vital to an ordinary bread-winner, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is not to blame". She had provided the circus minus the food, the weekly explained.[2]

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[1] *Imprint*, June, 1974.

[2] *The Thought*, May 25, 1974.

Franker, more caustic and unsparing comment came from some puritan Gandhians. In an open letter Radhakrishna, Secretary of Gandhi Peace Foundation, could not refrain from castigating the Government at the detonation. The letter concluded : "The whole thing is a cruel joke on the people of this country still waiting for the day when they can be sure of two square meals a day, two small pieces of cloth to hide their shame and a shaky roof over their heads."[1]

The motives of India in launching upon the atomic explosion were questioned. What made famishing India take up the hazardous path ? Evidently the five nuclear powers including China, were far in advance in nuclear research to feel concerned about themselves by India's gate-crashing into the nuclear club. By possessing nuclear arms India could only overawe the developing countries especially small neighbours who refused to accept her hegemony and carry out her behests. It was the same sickly craving to make the nation "big" which obssessed Jawaharlal Nehru in his lifetime and was now rousing his daughter, that impelled India to detonate a nuclear device. But such "bigness and strength" is sheer mockery. "Can a people", asked Balraj Mehta, an economic analyst, "be weak, undernourished, sickly, their vitality sapped and the barest essentials of civilised living denied to them and yet the nation become strong ?"[2]

Apart from the unhappy record of India in Kashmir, it was well-known that for over two decades Indian leaders had persistently refused to detonate a nuclear device and unreservedly rejected without exception proposals of chauvinistic parties like Jan Sangh, in this behalf. During his pilgrimage to Hiroshima, Nehru had admonished that "we must strive towards the goal of abolition of nuclear devices and disarmament". Even on April 20, 1970, Indira Gandhi "rejected the plea in the Lok Sabha for nuclear explosion for (even) peaceful pnrposes."[3] But barely four months later on August 2,

[1] *The Indian Express*, May 29, 1974.
[2] *Ibid.*, June 28, 1974.
[3] Quoted in *The Hindnstan Times*, May 19, 1974.

1970, an Expert Group was set up "to study technological and cost aspects if India were to make nuclear weapons."[1]

Surprisingly twenty-five days later the Prime Minister informed the Rajya Sabha that research was continuing for conducting a nuclear explosion.[2] Can the weaker neighbours be blamed if their misgivings were not allayed by plentiful Indian assurances ?

To develop and use nuclear technology for economic purposes is unexceptionable. Indeed, no finger was raised against it during the many years when Indian resources were employed in setting up reactors. It was the explosion that gave rise to the outcry. Experts have said that detonation of nuclear device is not necessary for utilizing nuclear power for peaceful purposes. The step is essential for manufacture of nuclear weaponry. Canada which had enthusiatically helped to erect the first Indian reactor at Trombay never exploded a nuclear device and angrily complained that in her talks with Mr. Trudeau, Canadian Prime Minister, in 1971, Mrs. Gandhi had agreed with Canadian definition that the peaceful uses of nuclear energy did not include any nuclear detonation. Canadian Government was sore that India unauthorisedly used the experience gained with Canadian assistance to produce the explosion.

Chinese added yet another plank to the raft of suspicion. Vice-Premier Teng-Hsiao-ping was reported to have told a Japanese delegation in Peking on June 5 that "Russia was behind the recent nuclear test conducted by India." Attacking the Russian leaders he said: "Social Imperialism had aimed at creating division and tumult in South Asia through the blast but the test would not achieve this aim nor would raise India's international presitige."[3]

Besides Canada, friendly nations like Sweden, West Germany, Japan and Australia were unhappy. Small neighbours kept discreetly silent only throwing out hints of feeling

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *The Indian Express,* June 7, 1974.

perturbed. The reason for this, in the words of the *Indian Express*, was that many nations feel genuinely concerned that "the Indian experiment will trigger similar endeavours among the non-nuclear countries. . . . It is obvious, however, that none of them is inclined to take assurances from the Government of India's professed resolve to restrict the technology to non-military purposes."[1]

The suspicion of the nations must have deepened when an unnamed Indian authority declared in London on May 22: "No Prime Minister of India and no Prime Minister in a comparable position in the world could ever totally rule out the possibility that there may have to be progression from peaceful use of nuclear energy to military application."[2]

It is noteworthy that the Jan Sangh which years back first demanded that the experiment be made at whatever cost gave a fresh slogan to the country. In a resolution passed on June, 1, 1974, the working committee of Jan Sangh "strongly favoured manufacturing nuclear weapons with the object of developing a viable nuclear deterrant to protect our independence." If past traditions are any guide it should be only a matter of time when the Congress after denouncing the new slogan for a while eventually acts upon the advice of Jan Sangh.

Nothing could have more boldly underlined the dichotomy between the professions and practice of Gandhians than the detonation of nuclear device. After having sanctimoniously denounced nuclear tests and atomic explosions by other countries for over three decades, India, exultantly though shamelessly, detonated a nuclear device when the country was passing through a deep economic crisis in its history in

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[1] *Ibid.*, May 22, 1975.

[2] Nor were the apprehensions of India's smaller neighbours allayed when in August-September, 1974, Sikkim, a tiny independent protectorate, under 1950 Indo-Sikkim Treaty, was deprived of her status and converted into an associate state by methods which Tridib Choudhary M.P. called "shameful" and the *Indian Express* termed "a historic blunder" (vide *Indian Express* September, 6, 1975,) In Nepal there were hostile public demonstrations against the move.

post-independence era. Nevertheless, it in no way violated the principle of Ram Rajya. Not for nothing did Gandhi's eminent disciple, Vinoba Bhave, support the explosion: "It is a logical consequence of India's age-long thinking on a sythesis between science and spirituality," he declared.[2]

That Pakistan reacted furiously to the Pokharan explosion is no surprise. She immediately started rebuilding her war machine with the active cooperation of America as well as some European and Muslim countries.

As early as 1973 reports emanating from different sources indicated that her armed might had attained the level of pre-1971 war days. Loss of Bangladesh territory had not been after all an unmitigated tragedy to her. Free from the liability of defending the vulnerable east wing, West Pakistan was calculated to be better able to face India if it comes to yet another clash over Kashmir.

The Pokharan explosion, however, has made Pakistan desperate; it is in search of material to produce nuclear weapons and resort to a bigger explosion. Though the Pakistan authorities have, time and again, contradicted the reports that the Pakistan Government is determined to come on equal footing with India if not excel it. President Zia-ul Haq has repeatedly assured India's Prime Minister that Pakistan's desire does not go beyond using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Nevertheless, it is difficult to disbelieve the painstakingly collected information from reputable Press representatives in this behalf.

The disclaimers of Pakistan rulers are given no more credence in sober diplomatic circles than similar pronouncements made by Indira Gandhi and her colleagues for some months before the Pokharan explosion.

On June 29, 1979, AP News agency reported from Paris : "Western diplomats here have confirmed the broad outlines of the scheme, whereby the dummy companies purchased highly sophisticated and carefully detailed centrifuge compo-

[1] *The Indian Express*, June 15, 1974.

nent parts from British, Dutch, West German and U.S. companies before western intelligence network uncovered the plan."

The News agency said:

> Most diplomats trace Pakistan nuclear push to 1974, when the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi's Government in neighbouring India shocked the world with a successful atomic explosion."

A British Labour MP, Leo Abse, revealed on June 28, 1979, in the House of Commons, that a Pakistan scientist, Dr. Khan, had stolen a blue print of enriched uranium from the Almelo Institute, a Dutch research laboratory run jointly by Britain, Holland and West Germany.

India's deep concern was voiced in a despatch from *UNI News Agency* circulated from New Delhi on June 19, 1979; it said:

> Pakistan is reported to be going ahead with its preparations to explode its first nuclear device in the next two to five years, Gen Ziaul Huq's denials notwithstanding.

The *Voice of America* quoted Columbia Broadcasting System to say that investigations in Western Europe and the United States discovered that "Pakistan had bought components from private companies with Libyan money and that it was conducting its nuclear plan under the guidance of a nuclear scientist who escaped from Holland after securing blue prints of important components from the Dutch firm that had employed him".

However, in India observers of the Pakistan nuclear programme say that Islamabad has reached a stage where it can explode a nuclear device before the end of this year (1979) itself. Their speculation is based on the progress of the development of nuclear technologies, platinum and enriched uranium.

It is said that Libya had committed 25 million dollars to Pakistan's bomb project; of this, Pakistan has already received 10 million dollars.

When the United States stopped its aid amounting to 85 million dollars to Pakistan in protest against its nuclear programme, Saudi Arabia offered Islamabad 45 million dollars and Libya 15 million dollars.

India cannot be absolved from the moral responsibility of the unhappy development in Pakistan which is sure to further aggravate the by-no-means good relations between the two neighbours.

CHAPTER NINE

Rising Forces of Fascism

From the outset after achievement of *swaraj* (self-rule), puritan Gandhians were opposed to their power-wielding revisionist brethren and disapproved the latter's partial advocacy of Western institutions, modern scientfic culture, non-conformist measures and liberal attitude in dealing with national problems. They laid stress on Gandhian values and principles in every walk of life—moral, political, economic and educational. But so long as Jawaharlal Nehru and after him Indira Gandhi, could command the support of the people, they vigorously followed the revisionist policies invoking at the same time the Mahatma's blessings; puritans helplessly looked on and saw wisdom in biding their time.

But, as we have seen, the Congress Government failed to fulfil the expectations, hopes and aspirations of the people which had been raised during the struggle for freedom; in the ruling party there was scramble for power and the state affairs were mismanaged; unemployment, poverty and corruption were fast growing which caused disaffection on a wide scale. Under Indira Gandhi conditions worsened and discontentment changed to disloyalty. Puritans were patiently waiting for such a situation to arise and did not lose a day to exploit it.

Encouraged by the sudden upheaval in Gujarat in early 1974 which resulted in resignation of the state Congress government and dissolution of State Legislative Assembly, Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the influential puritans, perceived that the opportunity for dealing a deadly blow at the revisionists had arrived, He, therefore, decided to launch an agitation in Bihar and thereafter, if possible, to spread it to other states for overthrowing the Congress rule. The allround deterioration in social life ensured public sympathy and anti-

government militant elements cropped up in many towns in north India. The situation was fraught with potentialities. It could be utilised for generating a genuine revolutionary climate which would change the thinking of the masses and destroy the many chains that shackled them for ages in all fields of life; it could revive the renaissance movement all but dead after independence; it could create a new mental outlook on life calculated to change the destiny of the nation. But there was no truly democratic and organized force to direct the downtrodden millons on the right path. In India there are scattered individuals or small groups of revolutionary thinkers; an organised wellknit party with clear thinking and sound ideas espousing humanist values, prepared to renounce irrational systems, obsolete Brahmin ideals and medieval mode of thought has not yet risen to measure swords with Gandhian nationalists.

Paradoxically, every revolutionary situation is also a counter-revolutionary situation. If there is no effective force to provide revolutionary leadership, counter-revolution is bound to turn the tide to its advantage. Puritan Gandhians waving a false revolutionary banner pushed forward to fight their own power battle against their cousins—the revisionist Gandhians—with the support of disaffected and suffering millions. Claiming to lead the roused masses in revolt against an inefficient, corrupt and despotic government, Jayaprakash Narayan fired the first salvo by demanding dismissal of the Bihar government, dissolution of the State Assembly and holding of fresh elections. These demands were illegal and unwarranted. According to the Constitution the duly elected assembly was entitled to function for five years which would terminate in 1977. Insistence of Jan Sangarsh Samiti and Chhatra Sangarsh Samiti, the two instruments employed by Jayaprakash Narayan, on the fulfilment of the three demands was not valid. In a democracy opposition creates public opinion in its favour and at the proper time asserts itself by securing majority of votes at the hustings; it has no right to threaten or coerce the lawfully constituted government to concede its demands by intimidation or coercion.

Throughout his public life it was the practice of Mahatma Gandhi that if he was sure of public support on a controversial issue he would press for votes of the concerned people, but if he sensed opposition of the majority he would resort to satyagraha which in extreme cases would mean his fasting unto death and under that threat have his way. Under the foreign rule it was a handy weapon which struck hard to achieve an aim. Jayaprakash was now utilising the tactics of his mentor in his movement. The only argument Jayaprakash advanced in support of his assertion was that he had rallied a number of people around himself who noisily supported him and his arbitrary demands. Quite justifiably Prime Minister Indira Gandhi firmly turned down the demands. She asseverated that even the dissolution of Gujarat Assembly was wrong and if she would agree to dissolve the Bihar Assembly also it would open flood gates of lawlessness in the country.

It was not without significance that among the supporters of Jayaprakash Narayan were, besides the puritan Gandhians, rabid Hindu communalists like Jan Sangh, the political arm of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), and some socialists. The common ground on which this motley crowd stood was its devotion to ancient Hindu culture embodied in Gandhian ideology; it was opposed to values ushered in by Renaissance and Enlightenment though it gave lip sympathy to secularism and modernity. Jayaprakash gradually emerged as the mouthpiece of reaction and symbolised counter-revolution which was taking the developing situation in its grasp. Meaningfully, he did not breathe a word against the root cause of India's misfortunes: fatalistic outlook, gullibility, degrading superstitions, harmful religious doctrines, outworn customs, obsolete ceremonies, irrational beliefs, lack of self-confidence and faith in the supernatural. He derived strength from popular disillusionment and widespread disaffection against Congress government as well as from the cultural backwardness of the people. His sole aim was to utilize frustrated aspirations and excited emotions of urbanites to overthrow the ruling Congress. He vociferously

talked about revolution, indeed total revolution, but was in practice serving the cause of communalism and reaction.

In essence Jayaprakash's struggle was for power not for himself but for those whom he patronised which makes little differences in the long run; revolution or democracy did not at all figure in his scheme despite his protestations. The weapons he wielded to oust Bihar Congress Govérnment were blatantly coercive, undemocratic and strong armed : To compel MLAs through terror to resign; to block the gates of assembly chamber against members desirous of participating in the assembly session which had been called; to disallow officials through picketing from performing their public duties; to gherao ministers and judges and force them not to leave their homes; to compel shopkeepers to down shutters etc. These means may be rightful according to Gandhian morality but decent and cultured people would call them hooligan acts; they are certainly not the methods and ways by which democracy functions.

Jayaprakash held mass demonstrations against Bihar government and launched *bandhs* to gain his objective; these ended in violence on a large scale as all such movements had in pre-and post-independence days. He advised students to boycott educational institutions and universities for a year as the education imparted was worthless. His plea that the Mahatma had resorted to such means and methods was acceptable neither to democrats nor to the Prime Minister. In free India, they contended, political movements should be peaceful and confined to persuasion, discussion and creation of public opinion; resort to intimidation and terror was totally inadmissible.

Annoyed by Indira Gandhi's unbending attitude, Jayaprakash contemplated adding more impermissible items to his ruinous plan. He hinted at creating a state of his own within Bihar, thereafter holding elections to Bihar Assembly and establishing a ministry which would follow his behests, collect revenues and establish courts. It was a clear call to lawlessness and chaos.

Since the day of independence, Jayaprakash had posed

that he disdained political power and was not interested in formation of government—central or state. From time to time he had announced disassociation with and, indeed, retirement from active politics. It was no sacrifice on his part nor any sign of large heartedness or self effacement. He had only to his dismay realized that the political climate was uncongenial to throw out the revisionists from citadels of power; wisdom therefore consisted in keeping aloof, at any rate for the time being. In the crisis facing the country and the disaffection it had generated in large sections of the people in 1974, Jayaprakash saw his chance and jumped headlong in the anti-government agitation.

Hesitating to make a frontal attack on Indira Gandhi in the beginning Jayaprakash in desperation a little later came out openly against her. He declared that the movement was primarily meant to oust her from power and all others with her who did not cherish full faith in the Mahatma's philosophy. He asseverated that it was a call for "complete revolution." He never spelt out the contents of that revolution. But reading between the lines of his statements it was clear that for him chaos and anarchy were another name for "total revolution" which he believed can put puritans in the saddle. He had designed dissolution of Bihar Assembly as the first important step in that direction. He said : "It is no longer valid that they (MLAs) were elected at the polls. Dikshitji (Home Minister of Indira Gandhi's government) says that they have right to remain for five years. They have absolutely no right to remain when they have become antipeople. They have no right to continue even for a day, no moral, constitutional or democratic right".

The important question arose as to who could finally decide about the representative character of the MLAs. They had been elected in 1972 and under the Constitution had the right to function as genuine representatives of the people and lawful members of the Bihar Assembly till 1977. Unless the government wanted to have a mid-term poll there was no constitutional provision for re-election. Collecting a militant disorderly crowd and on its backing ask for a fresh election did

not carry any weight; it was unjustified, unwarranted and invalid. If the demand was accepted no government whether in the centre or in the states could remain stable. Such challenges would be thrown to any government from the day of its being sworn in by any defeated or disgruntled politician able to rally a few hundred hired men.

Not being able to cut much ice in Bihar, Jayaprakash decided to carry the battle against revisionists in general and Indira Gandhi Government in particular, to New Delhi, the hub of India's politics. His agitation had no moral basis; it was politically motivated; of course he talked bombastically in terms of democracy, freedom, revolution and social justice to hoodwink the disaffected classes and also to conceal the ambition he nursed in his mind.

In every meeting Jayaprakash addressed in Delhi or in the surrounding areas, he belched fire appealing to audiences to rise in revolt without minding the Constitution or law but perfunctorily advising them to remain peaceful. Conscious of the disorder and violence that could be the outcome of his irresponsible utterances and activities, Narayan admitted that his revolution could lead to anarchy because, as he put it, "Revolution is a mad elephant". "As the year (1974) ended", say two admirers of Jayaprakash, S.P. Aiyar and S.V. Raju, assessing the political developments of the time, "the Government remained totally discredited and its moral legitimacy was shattered. This was the achievement of the movement which Jayaprakash Narayan had launched in Bihar."[1]

On January 3, 1975, L. N. Misra, Union Minister for Railways, was killed as the result of a grenade explosion at a public meeting in Samstipur (Bihar). Although the ruling politicians and opposition leaders accused each other for the crime of assassinating Misra, it clearly indicated the extent to which violence had spread in India's political life through wanton statements and speeches of opposition leaders including Jayaprakash.

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[1] *Indian's Ballot-Box Revolution*, Himalaya Publishing House (1978), p. 70.

Gujarat State Assembly had been dissolved on March 15, 1974, as a result of independent student agitation in which some local grievances were ventilated. The power-hungry opposition parties jumped into the arena to have their fingers in the pie. Jayaprakash hastily went to Ahmedabad and toured all over the State but his efforts to politicise the economic issues were unsuccessful. The students resented outside interference, As S. P. Aiyar and S.V. Raju, remark J.P.'s advice "fell on stony soil and there was little response". Then Morarji Desai came forward using the weapon of "fast unto death" reckoned to overshadow rationality, sensibility and morality; the fast precipitated matters and compelled the Union Government to hold state elections. Herself a Gandhian albeit a revisionist one and therefore susceptible to non-violent intimidation and terror, Indira Gandhi lost nerve and surrendered to the demand. It boosted the forces of violence and disorder. While Congress leaders were campaigning for their party candidates in elections, hooliganism ruled supreme. At Unjha, 90 kms. from Ahmedabad stones and slippers were hurled at Indira Gandhi at a public meeting but undeterred she managed to restore calm and address the audience. At another meeting on June 2, at Karjan near Baroda, Jagjivan Ram, Minister for Agriculture, was hit by a stone and severely injured.

This was only the start given to rowdy politics by puritan Gandhians. Henceforth there was no meeting held or procession carried out by them in which challenges were not thrown at the Congress Government that it would be brought down by hook or by crook. Every now and then threatenings were issued in rallies that the opposition leaders were determined to launch satyagraha on the floor of both Houses of the Parliament to deprive it from functioning as an august, lawfully eleted, civilised and constitutional body representing the 650 million Indians.

Bravely did Indira Gandhi stand these hideous challenges and in fairness it must be said that for many months she tolerated lawlessness of the puritans and communalists with unrivalled patience, forbearance and composure of mind. She repeatedly

asked her detractors to wait till 1977 when elections to the Lok Sabha would fall due and then display their strength and prove that the Congress Government was no more wanted by the people. But her spiritual cousins—the puritan Gandhians— led by Jayaprakash, J. B. Kripalani, Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, L.K. Advani and A.B. Vajpayee would hear no sane arguments and insisted that she must accept their private findings that the people were against her continuance in office and her government must abdicate or hold fresh elections. As according to the Constitution it is the privilege of the Prime Minister to decide about mid-term poll, Indira Gandhi was eminently in the right in firmly rejecting the demand. This infuriated those whose lust for power had been aroused and who thought their chance had come to launch a vigorous attack on the revisionists, deferred for many years.

While the battle for power was furiously raging, an event of historical importance unfavourable to Indira Gandhi took place; indeed, it was a bolt from the blue which hit her and changed the course of Indian politics.

In 1971 parliamentary elections, Raj Narain, a petti-fogging politician, contested against Indira Gandhi from Rae Bareli constituency. Expectedly, he was put to rout but he lost no time in filing an election petition on various grounds against his successful rival. The case lingered on for nearly four years in the Allahabad High Court presided over by Justice J. M. L. Sinha. In early June, 1975, while delivering his momentous judgement he allowed Raj Narain's petition and unseated Indira Gandhi finding her guilty of having taken the help of officials in election work. The charges accepted by Justice Sinha were not serious and some Western observers were amazed at the rigour of the Indian electoral law. Nevertheless, the fact remained that the Prime Minister had been found guilty of corrupt practices by the High Court and the political atmosphere in the country was electrified; it dealt a severe blow at the prestige of the Prime Minister. Considering the exalted position of the accused, Justice Sinha allowed

20 days for his order to be stayed to enable the Congress Party to elect a new leader who would replace Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister.

In a democracy the High Court order is expected to be implemented without delay or demur. It would therefore have been prudent for Indira Gandhi to submit and honourably vacate her seat in the Lok Sabha and surrender leadership of the Congress Government; it would have raised her moral and political stature. But doing so is not in the manual of the Ram Rajya. Her closest colleagues who were without exception her flatterers and sycophants impressed on her that she was indispensable for the safety, security and progress of India. D.K. Barooah, Congress President, went so far as to declare : "Indira is India and India is Indira".

Thus misguided she managed to collect crowds of ignorant and excitable men like taxi drivers, bullock cart owners, *rehri* wallahs and a lot of riffraff every day outside her house who raised slogans extolling her and insisting on her continuance as Prime Minister. Demagogically, she declared this to be the voice of India and justification for defiance of the High Court Judgement ?

At a short notice the Congress Parliamentary Party was summoned to hold a meeting; 451 members out of 500 attended. A resolution was passed with a thunderous applause expressing fullest faith and confidence in Mrs. Gandhi. Revisionists had now come down to the level of the puritans adopting the same anti-democratic, anti-constitutional, rabble-rousing and fascist methods. Being the chips of the same Ram Rajya block, both utilized similar methods when driven to desperation.

To maintain a legal facade for her misdoings, Indira Gandhi appealed to the Supreme Court against Justice Sinha's Judgement. As the Court was closed for summer holidays the case was heard by the vacation judge, V.R. Krishna Aiyer. He handed down his orders on June 24. In a 23-page verdict he allowed Mrs. Gandhi a conditional stay order till the Supreme Court reopened and gave its final judgement. Meanwhile, Justice Aiyer allowed that Mrs. Gandhi could continue

as Prime Minister and speak in either House of Parliament but take no part in its proceedings, nor vote or draw salary as member of Lok Sabha. It was clear victory neither for revisionists nor for puritans but the verdict gave birth to a keen controversy and public excitment; Indira Gandhi's position was further lowered in the estimation of people in this country and abroad.

The puritans were not the men to let grass grow under their feet when there was a windfall in their favour. However high might have been the status of the Congress government — its legal position, its popularity, its achievements — in the eyes of the people and impartial observers in particular, until 1975, the Allahabad judgment and its aftermath certainly undermined its position. The puritans considered it the aptest opportunity to strike and strike hard.

Four opposition parties Jan Sangh, Congress (O), Bhartiya Lok Dal (BLD) and Socialist Party joined hands to draw up a plan to overthrow Indira Gandhi and destroy her government. On June 21, 1975, Jayaprakash Narayan participated in a joint meeting of the parties to organize a nation wide "Indira Hatao" (Remove Indira) campaign. Under the presidentship of Morarji Desai the meeting was attended by members of the central executive committees of the four parties. There was little in common in the political philosophies followed respectively by these parties excepting the hatred of the revisionist Gandhians captained by Indira Gandhi.

The opposition launched, on June 25 in the morning, a militant body named Lok Sangarsh Samiti to carry on a sustained struggle against Indira Gandhi Government through morchas, rallies, other demonstrations and also through defiance of law. In the evening addressing a big meeting at the Ram Lila Grounds in New Delhi, Jayaprakash Narayan appealed to the army, police and government officials not to obey the orders of the government which they considered illegal or unconstitutional. This ambiguous and apparently unobjectionable but provocative and explosive statement made in a surcharged atmosphere could be intolerable

to any government—despotic or democratic, capitalist or socialist, foreign or national. Indira Gandhi frequently referred to it among other things for resorting to the most draconian measure in the same night of June 25 to deal with the rising forces of disorder, lawlessness and hooliganism.

CHAPTER TEN

First Dose of Dictatorship

Without taking her cabinet colleagues into confidence or even informing them about it, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi called on President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed in the afternoon on June 25, to explain to him the grave situation that had arisen and advised him to declare a state of internal emergency in the country under Article 352 of the Constitution. In her letter to the President sent through a special messenger in the evening the Prime Minister gave one vital reason for the proposed drastic step: imminent danger to the security of India being threatened by internal disturbances. She also told the President that it was impossible to consult the cabinet.

That both these statements were false was proved to the hilt by Shah Commission which was appointed by the successor Janata Government to investigate the excesses perpetrated under the emergency regime. Shedding light on the circumstances prevailing on June 25, the Commission reported :

> Even before the President had signed the declaration many top-ranking leaders including Jayaprakash Narayan, Charan Singh, Morarji Desai, L.K. Advani, A.B. Vajpayee, and hundreds of political workers of different parties suspected of evil designs, were arrested under the infamous Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) which had been put on the statute book in 1971 with fullest assurance given in Parliament that it had been passed to curb criminal deeds like smuggling and would never be used to suppress political activities of the opposition. No mention was made about the arrests in any news bulletin, broadcast by All India Radio (AIR) or TV; to the shock of Indian people the first information about the wide ranging arrests and other suppressive measures of the Government came from BBC on June 26.

The Commission pointed out :

> On the economic front there was nothing alarming. On the contrary the wholesale price Index had declined by 7.4 per cent between December 3, 1974, and the last week of March, 1975. On the law and order front, the fortnightly reports sent by the Governors of various States to the President of India and by the chief secretaries of the States to the Union Home Secretary, indicated that the law and order situation was under complete control all over the country.

The truth is that apart from Jayaprakash Narayan's rowdy movement, the Allahabad Judgement had sent Indira Gandhi into jitters; she had panicked. As was her wont she acted on her own and in imposing the emergency consulted with none of her cabinet colleagues. It speaks volumes about the character and quality of the cabinet that there was not even the mildest protest from anyone of its members for being thus humiliated.

Almost all national dailies published from New Delhi failed to appear for three days as electricity was cut off in the areas where they were printed.

Indira Gandhi had irrevocably resolved to rule despotically with iron hand and without any compunction which in any case never bothered her. In a broadcast speech from AIR the Prime Minister explained to the nation why the Government had adopted the harsh measure: it was to protect the country from falling into pieces; however, she assured that the emergency would not affect "law abiding citizens." Not entirely unjustifiably she blamed the opposition for having forced her hands to take the extreme step and enumerated the forces of disintegration which were rapidly spreading in the country. She said :

> All manner of false allegations had been hurled against me . . . It is not important whether I remain Prime Minister or not; however, the institution of Prime Minister is important and deliberate political attempts to denigrate it is not in the interest of democracy or of the nation.

Having taken the plunge, Indira Gandhi worked with

ruthless efficiency to deal with every manner of opposition which crossed her wishes in the least. She fully utilized AIR and TV to glorify the emergency and at the same time forbade any mention of the diabolical repression that she had let loose on opposition leaders and workers.

Disregarding Nehru's healthy views on Press freedom referred to earlier, she got each and every journal all over the country censored. It bewildered the people and the opposition was stunned. Not a sentence critical of Government policy or administrative lapses was allowed to appear in the Press. New ordinances and laws to meet the unforeseen developments were promptly promulgated under the emergency powers. Indiscriminate arrests of workers remotely associated with opposition or suspected of harbouring critical views became a daily occurrence. Even those who reasonably and mildly protested against the draconian measures were not spared but peremptorily consigned behind the bars. Among those taken into custody were former ministers, governors, senior politicians, distinguished journalists, advocates, social leaders, teachers, trade unionists, businessmen, officials and students; the police lathis, teargas shells and guns were freely used to put down agitations. Nothing escaped the vigilant eye of the Prime Minister and her minions in the vast land which could frustrate her no-longer-hidden aim to become a dictator. Her capacity to work and organise was astounding. Yet suffering from guilty conscience she felt insecure and sensed a rebellious spirit rising in every nook and corner.

Finding that harsher measures were needed to effectively deal with the invisible revolt against the unbridled tyranny, the Government only four days after imposition of emergency, amended MISA. It enabled the authorities to detain anyone without assigning reasons for his or her detention for one year; it also became possible to detain the same person for a second year by issuing a fresh detention order when the day of detenu's release arrived.

V.C. Shukla, Minister for Information and Broadcasting,

issued a set of guidelines to the Press to be on guard against unauthorised reports or unfavourable comments. The policy of smothering free thought was amazingly successful because with very rare and honourable exceptions eleven thousand odd journals sheepishly yielded when faint protestation of some of them was contemptuously responded and firmly dealt with. All national newspapers forgetting the airs they gave of being brave and independent in expression of views, during the freedom struggle and after, servilely submitted to the dictates, The few who heroically resisted the pressure gradually disappeared from the field for one reason or another, mostly because printers refused to print their journals.

Reporting on the Press censorship Shah Commission observed :

> Parliamentary and court proceedings were also subject to censorship... statements made on behalf of Government could be published either in full or in a condensed form. Nothing else was allowed to be published except the names and party affiliation of the members speaking on a subject.
> As regards the court of law, guidelines issued to the Press which said that while publishing news comments or reports relating to proceedings in a court of law only the operative part of the judgement was to be published in appropriate language.

Summing up its findings on the subject the Commission remarked :

> In practice censorship was utilised for suppressing news unfavourable to the Government, to play up news favourable to the Government and to suppress news unfavourable to the supporters of the Congress Party.

Individual correspondents of national newspapers were harassed in different ways if they refused to toe the Government line; the most effective means of subjugating them was by cancellation of their accreditation.

The case was, however, different with foreign correspondents who refused to send despatches under any restric-

tion. They were asked to sign a bond agreeing to abide by precensorship laws, else to leave India. Within a week after the declaration of emergency, Levis M. Simons of the *Washington Post* had to go. He was followed by Loren Jenkins of *News Week*, Peter Hazulhurst of the *London Times* and Peter Gil of *Daily Telegraph*. On its own, BBC withdrew its correspondent, Mark Tully, on the ground that the Corporation could not stand the severity of the censorship rules. Protests were made by all reputable journals from several democratic countries for the shocking restrictions placed on free reporting and one after another their correspondents had to leave India finding no journalistic work worth the name, to do. No vehicle of propaganda was left free but pressed into service of the emergency regime. Both AIR and TV assumed the role of official publicity organs. The Shah Commission's remarks are devastating on this point :

> The slant against the opposition was so obvious that in December 1976 AIR bulletins devoted 2207 lines to the spokesman of the Congress Party as against 34 lines to the opposition. In December 1974, the same figures had been 571 and 522 respectively.

But that was not all. The Shah Commission wrote :

> The other government media, i.e. Directorate of Field Publicity and Song and Drama Division, were also asked to project the image of Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress Party.

On July 4, the Government banned the activities of 28 political organisations including Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), Anand Marg, Jamait-i-Islami, Proust Block, and such other bodies as Naxalites of different shades.

With civil liberties and fundamental human and democratic rights curtailed, Indira Gandhi ruled like a medieval monarch. She was called a *maharani* (queen) which she relished because it tickled her vanity. Repeatedly she claimed that she had saved India from being destroyed. Her favourite

observation was : "Democracy had been derailed and my task is to put it back on the rails." She maintained that conditions were quite normal in the country. Whenever questioned about the number of political prisoners in different jails she never gave the exact figure but on July 12, 1975, she stated vaguely that the total number was very small considering the population of the country. However, it was well known that there were round about one hundred thousand prisoners mostly as detenus held under MISA.

That India was not involved in a big conflagration after imposition of emergency and promulgation of draconian laws, as had been predicted by opposition leaders, is corrct; normal life was not interfered with or interrupted. Barring those who were imprisoned or their followers, relations and friends (which altogether was less than one per cent of population) the overwhelming majority of the people was calm and unconcerned. Indeed, they felt more secure, satisfied and happy due to the discipline, alertness and devotion to duty (however forced) which had appeared in the wake of emergency not only in the officialdom but also in the labouring classes, industry, trade and professions. It was a source of relief to the common man and peace-loving citizen that violent satyagrahas, strikes, hartals, bandhs and hooliganism had come to an abrupt stop, at any rate brought under control; incidence of crime had been reduced and antisocial elements had become conspicuous by their absence; shopkeepers no longer demanded any price they liked for consumer goods because attaching of price tag on all commodities had been made compulsory. Not only officials from the highest to the lowest but also traders, businessmen, wage earners, shopkeepers and others were brought to senses and made to attend to their work, be courteous and realize their obligations to the society. Corruption decreased and the prices of essential necessities stabilised. Life of a citizen which had lost value acquired some meaning. There was no doubt terror in the atmosphere but it was in the minds of politically conscious, a small fraction of the population; the preponderating majority was not displeased or angry.

These were the gains which citizens harassed in pre-emergency days by anti-social elements, deeply appreciated. This was sufficient compensation for loss of fundamental rights for which illiterate, indigent, ignorant masses in the countryside and even semi-educated middle class people in the urban areas little bothered. Had not things taken a turn for the worse as we shall presently discuss, Indira Gandhi might have succeeded in attaining her objective and India securely fallen into the clutches of a benevolent dictatorship.

From ancient times the cruelly exploited millions in this country have been driven like dumb cattle and treated like slaves by the upper castes. Ninety per cent people of this benighted land have not enjoyed any rights under Hindu or Muslim rule. They had only to fulfil numberless obligations which reduced them to the status of serfs. It was either during a few centuries when Buddhism prevailed or more so under the British rule that the Indian masses had a modicum of freedom and were able to develop a sense of individuality, dignity and responsibility. In the post-Mughal anarchy, what the Indians pined for was peace, security and payment of fair wages for labour done.

This had been provided by the British if not fully but surely beyond the expectation of the conquered Indians. After the termination of the alien rule in 1947, the better prospects of life were feared to be increasingly falling in jeopardy. The creation of disorderliness was ascribed to the activities of designing power-hungry politicians. For this if not for anything else, Indira Gandhi was hailed as a saviour and emergency a blessing, at any rate in the first few months of its imposition. Intelligentsia might have grumbled, groaned and sulked and the politically-conscious felt infuriated, but the unsophisticated, simple-minded and peace-loving multitudes did not complain but felt contented and satisfied.

Soon puritan Gandhians and their communalist allies, confronted this reality born of Indian culture, and could not help visualizing a bleak future for themselves. Consequently hundreds of those imprisoned tendered apology to secure

release. Even some big guns recognised the foolishness and untenability of their stance.

After a few months of detention in a rest house, Jayaprakash Narayan was on November 12, 1975, unconditionally released on grounds of ill health. Witnessing popular enthusiasm for the emergency rule, he failed to provide any lead to the opposition or even talk about his pet idea of "total revolution". The activities of Jan Sangarsh Samiti were confined to clandestinely issuing irregular news letters and circulars. On February 12, 1976, in an interview to the correspondent of the *Swaraj* of Surrey (England), Jayaprakash repented :

> I think if I could have foreseen the possibility (of imposition of emergency) I would not have gone as far as non-cooperation, non-payment of land and other taxes, which I advocated, but would have concentrated more on political action and democratic action rather than direct action.

Of greater significance were the observations Jayaprakash made in the interview about satyagrarha :

> It was under the British rule that Gandhiji carried out non-violent resistence and it was successful. There was a certain quality which British rule had. If the British rule and the British people did not have that quality and Gandhiji was faced not with the British but with Hitler it is difiicult to say whether he would have been successful.[1]

Like Jayaprakash Narayan, many other leaders of the opposition including J. B. Kripalani, Morarji Desai ruefully remembered the fairness and justice of British rule.

The Sarsanchalak of RSS, Madhukar Dattatraya Deoras (popularly known as Bala Sahib Deoras), felt more dejected and downcast than Jayaprakash. In face of an indomitable and unforgiving adversary like Indira Gandhi, he exposed many weaknesses of his character and culture. He thought wisdom consisted in yielding and in trying to make up with

[1] Quoted in *Five Headed Monster* by Brahm Dutt, p. 69.

the formidable Prime Minister. He wrote a number of letters to Indira Gandhi throwing even discretion to winds and virtually asking for pardon on bended knees.

From behind the bars, Deoras wrote on August 22, 1975, to the Prime Minister praising her speech delivered on Independence Day from the Red Fort ramparts as "suitable for the occasion and well balanced". Flattery followed this observation and the letter concluded with the prayer to lift the ban on RSS and grant him an interview. Deoras assured Mrs. Gandhi that the RSS had never been with Jayaprakash Narayan and had no interest in the Sarvodaya leader. There was no reply to the letter.

Deoras wrote again to the Prime Minister on November 10, 1975, in a similar vein. He congratulated Indira Gandhi on the success she had achieved in the Supreme Court on her election petition (which was, it may be noted, due to the restrictions placed on the powers of the Court under Emergency laws). Deoras offered his unstinted cooperation to the Prime Minister's 20-point programme and constructive activities. He supported the emergency and said the RSS would like to participate in the programme. Again, there was no reply; the letter was not even acknowledged.

Maintaining his spirit of reconciliation, Deoras sent a third letter assuring the Prime Minister that "the disciplined cadre of the RSS would engage itself in the implementation of the 20-point programme if they were released from the jails." The letter fared no better than its predecessors.

The plight of Deoras can be imagined from the fact that he made a fourth attempt to elicit some response from the Prime Minister. He repeated what he had already said in a more submissive and fawning tone. But Indira Gandhi remained adamant.

In utter discomfiture and helplessness, Deoras approached Acharya Vinoba Bhave who was known to be in the good books of the incipient dictator, to intercede on his and RSS' behalf. The Prime Minister was scheduled to meet the Acharya at Paunar Ashram on November 24, 1977; this too proved a

futile attempt.[1]

Another stalwart of the opposition, Biju Patnaik (now a member of Janata Cabinet), when released from Jail in October, 1975, was reported to have advised that the opposition "should adopt a conciliatory attitude". Significantly, he remarked that the positive gains of the emergency period should be appreciated without any prejudice adding that democracy could be restored under the leadership of Indiraji.[2]

Thus within a few months of emergency rule, Indira Gandhi had by means fair and foul, secured her position and brought the political situation in the country completely in her iron grasp. But despite her dictatorial temperament and authoritarian ways, she was reluctant altogether to wind up the consutitutional form of government and establish naked despotism. She had not completely abandoned faith in democracy. In however a mutilated form she preserved the Constitution and the Parliament and intended to rule through it. Undoubtedly most of the opposition members being absent it was a rump Parliament which had become a hand maid to carry out her wishes but it was not destroyed.

On July 21, 1975, the Lok Sabha met; the procedures relating to the question hour, calling attention motions and private members' business were suspended after an acrimonious discussion. Most of the members including a few belonging to the Congress and some independents expected to cause inconvenience, had been imprisoned. A few freedom-loving MPs who escaped the vigilant eye of Police and attended the session spoke effectively and eloquently championing the cause of lost liberty but not a word of dissent was allowed to appear in the Press.

The resolution to legalise emergency was moved by Jagjivan Ram, Minister for Agriculture, who had "forgotten" to pay income tax for ten years and was beholden to Indira

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 138—148. Also see Chaudhri Charan Singh's statement in the *Hindustan Times* dated July 5, 1979.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Gandhi for pardoning him and defending his "forgetfulness." He argued that the emergency was culmination of various developments over a number of years. In particular, he referred to the movement started by Jayaprakash Narayan who "wanted to bring in revolution through the barrel of the gun. Therefore, it was necessary to stop such things." Indira Gandhi quoted extensively from the utterances and writings of Jan Sangh and RSS leaders to illustrate their deep hostility towards secularism and their fascist attitude.

Not only did the rump Parliament put its stamp of approval on the declaration of emergency but also passed a constitutional amendment bill placing the declaration outside the purview of the Supreme Court. Thereafter, H.R. Gokhale, Minister for Law, moved one after another a number of outrageous bills to curtail people's liberties guaranteed by the Constitution, to strengthen the position of the Government which thus virtually obtained a *carte blanch*. Gokhale rushed through both houses of Parliament an astounding amendment of the Constitution which removed the election of President, Vice President, Prime Minister and Speaker of Lok Sabha, from the jurisdiction of all courts. These offices were put above the law of the land. Shorn of its powers the Supreme Court was compelled to pronounce judgement on November 7, 1975, in Indira Gandhi's favour in her appeal against the verdict of Allahabad High Court.

Some detenus were released from time to time by different High Courts on the ground that no specific charges had been mentioned to justify their detention. To overcome this happening in more cases Government by an ordinance further amended MISA which laid down that it was not necessary to disclose the reasons for detention to anyone including the court.

Since the Government, it will be recalled, enjoyed two-third majority in the Parliament it was easy to frequently amend the Constitution to meet the needs of the ruling party. Through the Thirty-ninth Amendment no fewer than thirty-eight Acts were given protection by placing them in the Ninth Schedule to prevent their being challenged on the ground that

they violated fundamental rights of the citizen. Likewise, sixty-four Acts were protected by the Fortieth Amendment; the country was ruled by a host of lawless laws.

The Government passed three laws to ensure that there was no criticism whatsoever of the measures adopted by the rump Parliament. First the Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act; second, the Repeal of the Parliamentary Proceedings Act; and, third, the Dissolution of Press Council.

Obviously Indira Gandhi was to all intents and purposes clearing the path to her dictatorship. She had reduced the Constitution to a hollow shell by emptying it of valuable contents and made herself supreme and responsible to no one inside or outside the Parliament. Her word was now the law. It was this method which Hilter had employed in creating a Nazi-fascist state in Germany forty years ago.

Easy passage of harsh legislation, complete suppression of dissent, docility of the Press, obsequiousness of her cabinet colleagues, stoppage of anti-Government demonstrations and hartals, strict vigilance over smugglers and disturbers of peace, growing sense of responsibility and efficiency in administration and, above all, cooperation of lower and, to a considerable degree, middle classes, made Indira Gandhi feel complacent. When a section of intelligentsia and businessmen including well-known and respected figures applauded her policies she felt triumphant. Day in and day out she attacked the unreconciled intellectuals and opposition politicians for living in an unreal world of their own. Prof. Aloo Dastur of the Bombay University voicing the feelings of the enlightened, observed :

> The country has reached such a stage in its political and constitutional evolution that voices for reason are drowned in shibboleths. A strong populism has taken over and there is a stampede to conform to authoritarianism.

In her blissful complacency Indira Gandhi thought of thrusting her own ideas of progress and of implementing plans for social, economic and political upliftment of the masses. Though she had kept her cabinet intact and Parliament was

in existence, a caucus of flatterers, sycophants and self-seekers had come to be formed round her on whom she relied for consultation. Unbelievably, the vast country populated by 650 million people was run by the coterie of hand-picked persons who were responsible to no class or section of people but to herself. The only previlege (or call it power if you like) exercised by the ministers was to say ditto to what Indira Gandhi and her caucus did or failed to do. Voluntarily depriving herself of the benefit of dissent and disagreement in the Press or on platform a chasm appeared between her and the people which yawned in the months to come as a result of the many misdeeds committed by her favourites with or without her connivance.

Indira Gandhi formulated a twenty-point programme to ameliorate the sad lot of the poverty-stricken millions. There was neither anything new nor original in the sketchy plan; all the points had been thrashed out in official and non official circles in post-independence era; they could be found in the election manifestos of various political parties notably the Congress itself. Only the politicians in power had dismally failed to carry them out. What, however, puzzled the world was one item out of the twenty confessing that hundreds of thousand Indians continued to be held as bonded labourers even after twenty-nine years of Congress rule. The item stressed that their shackles had to be smashed.

The Prime Minister had no doubt in her mind that the 20-point programme was a panacea for all ills from which Indian society suffered. It therefore assumed the form of a *mantra* which was chanted throughout the country to please her. Many public institutions, private bodies, businessmen, entrepreneurs, professors and publishers hypocritically swore to make the 20-point programme a success. Most of those who differed maintained silence.

Indira Gandhi ardently hoped that the programme would introduce the economic revolution calculated to banish wide-spread poverty. What, however, made her restless was the detention of thousands of men and women who would not yield and refused to toe her line. Among them were not only

ordinary men and women who hailed from cities and towns but also respected personages and distinguished citizens. The number of the prisoners being large they were huddled together in barracks and treated like felons; rudeness towards cultured inmates of the jails was not uncommon, but was generally patiently suffered. Worse things came to pass while the henchmen of the Government attempted to vanquish the rebellious spirit of some prisoners. "Human ingenuity and cunning were exhausted", record the authors of *India's Ballot-Box-Revolution*, "in improvising a wide range of techniques used for extorting information. These included the stamping of the bare body with ammunition boots, inserting electric wires in the crevices of the body, burning the skin with cigarettes or candles, dangling prisoners from the ceiling on a rope-the-aeroplane. And then there was that dreadful 'Hyderabad goli' which consisted of a steel rod smeared with chilli powder thrust into the anus of the prisoner."[1]

Social reforms are rarely popular. If meant to be carried out with cooperation of the people labouring under influence of religious culture it is bound to take time and tax the patience of reformers. But in her zeal coupled with a deceptive sense of security, Indira Gandhi desired to achieve her reformist aims more by coercion, intimidation and brute force than through education and persuasion.

Among the sorely needed reforms were slum clearance and family planning which she decided to tackle with determination, ruthlessness and speed. Both were laudable ideas. But abominable methods were employed to enforce the two plans. Most of the slum dwellers uprooted and resettled in various parts of New Delhi lost their petty domestic jobs which they had in the locality where their shacks stood. In Turkman Gate area bulldozers were operated to raze ramshackle buildings whose occupants had been living in them for decades. Police opened fire to terrify them and break their resistance, a few including sick and old persons were killed and many injured. It caused deep resentment.

[1] *Op. Cit.*, p. 142.

Much worse occured in the case of family planning. For years extensive propaganda in different ways had been carried on to awaken people and impress upon them the disastrous consequences of population explosion and therefore the great need to put curbs on new births. But the results had been anything but satisfactory. Incentives and allurements proved ineffective, partly due to corruption of officials responsible to make the plan a success but mainly because of the religious outlook of the masses which was piously fortified by the national leaders themselves. The discipline and docility generally met with under emergency rule were thought to be favourable for adopting a harsh attitude in order to achieve better results and save the country from the danger of fast growing population. Compulsion was used on wide scale to sterilize men. Unwilling, terrified and protesting people were got hold of from anywhere—buses, parks, highways, and railway trains—for sterilization. Women teachers were told that their salaries would be withheld until they were able to produce at least two persons each who would undergo sterilization. The affair assumed scandalous proportions.

Vasectomy certificates became very important documents in possession of people : ration card, licence for rickshaw driving, temporary government employment, admission of children in schools were subjected to the production of the certificate.

Nothing, however, damaged the democratic image of Indira Gandhi more than the misdeeds of her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, which she not only connived at and deliberately overlooked but also justified publicly.

Sanjay Gandhi's record as a student was by no means creditable. Having worked, at the termination of his undistinguished and irregular studies, in Rolls Royce car factory in Britain but failed to qualify as an engineer, he aspired to produce a small car in India for which many Indians much more capable than he, had sought licence from the authorities. But the Congress Government decided to give priority

to the manufacture of the car in the public sector discouraging all entrepreneurs from making any attempt in this direction. When, however, Sanjay appeared on the scene Prime Minister Indira Gandhi altered the policy and the item of small car production was thrown open to private sector to enable her son to fulfil his burning desire.

From the outset the Prime Minister took deep and active interest in her son's project which he gave the name of Maruti Limited. She would not permit anything however trivial or insignificant connected with it, to take place without her full knowledge or agreement.

Early in 1970 when it became known that the Government was willing to entertain applications from competent persons for manufacture of a small car, eleven men applied for letter of intent; Sanjay Gandhi was one of them. Out of the eleven two were chosen as deserving to be encouraged and given a chance; of course, Sanjay was one who secured the letter of intent on August 31, 1970. The other to receive the letter was M.H. Thakkar of Baroda.

In his application Sanjay claimed that his car would be completely indigenous. The letter of intent to him laid down four conditions: First, there will be no foreign collaboration or foreign consultancy arrangements; second, no import of capital goods would be allowed; third, no import of components or raw materials; and fourth, a prototype of the car would be developed, got tested and approved for roadworthiness by a proper authority appointed by the Goverment.

As it turned out while building his prototype car, Sanjay circumvented all the four conditions. The Vehicle Research and Development Establishment (VRDE) which was appointed by the Government to test the roadworthiness of the prototype refused to issue the certificate due to grave defects found in it.

Yet on July 25, 1974, the Prime Minister got the required licence issued to Sanjay for the manufacture of the car. M.H. Thakkar who had, during the same period, developed his prototype of the car, satisfactorily completed its performance trials and succeeded in all major tests, was brusquely refused the licence.

Governmental authority and administrative power were misused at every level to make Sanjay's project successful.

In his application to the Government, Sanjay stated that he would need only 75 acres of land for his factory. Bansi Lal, chief minister of Haryana, volunteered to make such a plot of land available in his state.

Strong opposition in Haryana State Legislature to Bansi Lal's rule had endangered his position as chief minister. He therefore wanted to curry favour with the Prime Minister to save his high office. He found it easy to achieve that purpose by fulfilling each and every desire of Sanjay Gandhi. In such congenial situation the son of Prime Minister became more demanding. He now asked for 300 acres of land in place of 75 acres. Bansi Lal readily agreed. Sanjay selected the most fertile land in Gurgaon district close to the capital of India. Greater part of the land was owned by 191 persons who lived on its produce. Being adjacent to the Army air strip the Defence Department raised serious objections to the construction of a factory on the land. But neither the strong protests of the landowners who were not given even two weeks notice to vacate nor the remonstrance of the Defence Services were heeded.

During the course of the land transaction, Sanjay Gandhi began to display his qualities of impatience and intolerance. He wanted to get done everything as he liked. Bansi Lal utilised all means, legal and unlawful, to carry out his behests. The Chief Minister coerced officials to fulfil the wishes of Sanjay in utter disregard of laws, rules and regulations in force in the state.

Since so much land was not needed for the proposed car factory, Sanjay, in defiance of the provisions of the agreement entered into with the Haryana state authorities for the land, leased a large part of it to others even for agricultural purposes.

Indira Gandhi was fully informed about these transactions but she connived at them. Indeed, as quid pro quo she peremptorily refused to entertain any petitions against Bansi Lal and praised his efficiency and services to the Haryana

people. He was elevated to the coveted post of Defence Minister in the Central Cabinet for which he was totally unfit.

Visualizing dim prospects of the car factory, Sanjay started in 1974, two new concerns under the auspices of Maruti Limited, namely, Heavy Vehicles Private Limited and Maruti Technical Service Private Limited. These were purely family concerns but were financed with the huge amounts he obtained from the nationalized banks in the name of the car factory.

No sooner was the license for manufacture of the small car issued to Sanjay than he sought loans from the banks which were advanced to him more often than not against rules and on less interest than paid by other customers placed in similar circumstances. But the more accommodating and submissive became the bank officials, the more was Sanjay's hunger whetted for money. He would brook no refusal to whatever he demanded. He threatened the officials with dire consequences including imprisonment under MISA if his wishes were crossed.

The sordid tale of Sanjay Gandhi's haughty attitude and behaviour towards officials and others including share holders of Maruti Limited, has been fully narrated on the strength of verified documents and evidence of high placed and responsible civil servants, by Justice A.C. Gupta, a standing judge of the Supreme Court, who constituted the commission appointed by the Janata Government on May 31, 1977, to go into the Maruti affairs. It is not possible to recount all the startling findings of the Commission. However, as an example, I may refer to the squalid way in which Sanjay defrauded the nationalized banks.

The Commission revealed that over the years the Punjab National Bank and the Central Bank of India advanced Rs 50 lakhs and Rs. 22 lakhs respectively to Maruti Limited in violation of all norms and procedures, The norms and procedures were repeatedly changed whenever Sanjay Gandhi wanted them to be changed. The rate of interest was lowered when he asked for it.

But Gandhi's avarice was boundless. He asked for a loan of Rs. 1.5 crores from the Central Bank of India which its chairman, D.V. Taneja, dare not advance being illegal and unauthorised. After considerable hesitation he politely declined to do so. Calling the bank chairman to the Prime Minister's house Sanjay assumed imperiousness and tried to bluff but realizing that Taneja was adamant he abused and humiliated the responsible officer. The Prime Minister in her turn cut short the services of Taneja; an enquiry was launched to involve him in some criminal activity but had to be dropped for lack of evidence against him.

Despite the unwarranted assistance to Maruti Limited and the false reports made by some officials about the roadworthiness of the prototype car, Sanjay's project ended in complete failure. Therefore, he concentrated his attention on the two aforementioned subsidiary firms. They were solely run through official patronage. At least chief ministers of five other states were involved in going out of their way in unlawfully helping Sanjay to mint money through the running of the two firms.

While Bansi Lal has been indicted by the Gupta Comission for helping Sanjay Gandhi in acquiring land at the cost of defence interests, Harideo Joshi of Rajasthan, S.C. Shukla of Madhya Pradesh and N.D. Tewari of Uttar Pradesh have been indicted for helping him with busbody building orders from the state governments.

In Rajasthan Harideo Joshi threatened the Chief Engineer of Public Works Department (B and R) with detention under MISA if he did not place orders for Maruti road rollers before January 3, 1976, saying that "this is emergency time and anything can happen to you." The Chief Engineer, Durga Prasad Jain, relayed the threat to other officers who had pointed out deficiencies in the Maruti road roller.

The office bearers of the managing committees of the two firms were members of Gandhi family drawing fat salaries. The money recieved from governmental sources and share holders of Maruti Limited was siphoned off to the subsidiaries to keep them running merrily.

Fully aware of the illegal transactions and criminality involved, Sanjay did not properly sign letters (which were often issued undated) and addressed by him to officers, nor the documents which were prepared in connection with Maruti affairs. In some of them a scratch of the pen or a tick mark had to be accepted as his signature. His supercilious and overbearing behaviour was not only unbearable but suffocating to conscientious officers.

The Indian Parliament was kept all along uninformed about what was going on regarding the building of Maruti and running of the two subsidiary firms. The Prime Minister gave evasive and even false replies when any point was raised on the floor of either house. When four officials were deputed by the authorities to collect facts about Maruti to enable cabinet ministers to give accurate and proper replies to questions asked in the Parliament the officers were insulted, got arrested and imprisoned for the audacity to make inquiries about the factory of no less a person than the Prime Minister's son who should have been considered to be above the laws of the land.

Objections were no doubt raised in Parliament by fearless critics against the grant of the letter of intent to Sanjay. PSP leader S.N. Dwivedi refered to the Santhanam Committee's opinion that members of the family of a minister, or others occupying high positions, should not have any business transactions with the Government. Madhu Limaye, SSP leader, called it a "naked display of favouritism and corruption" and his colleague Raj Narain demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister.

Defending the Government's decision against the combined attack, Dinesh Singh, then Industrial Development Minister, asserted that the lettet of intent had been granted within the four corners of the existing procedures and no impropriety or irregularity could be attributed to it. Replying to questions of journalists on the issue at Ahmedabad, Mrs. Gandhi remarked:

All these years rich people wanted to produse a small car with foreign

> collaboration but none of them had made efforts to produce their own design. Now when my son has shown the enterprise and taken the risk, I could not say 'no' to him. If he is not encourrged how can I ask other young men to take risks?

How could glaring irregularities, unlawful dealings and execution of mere whims of an individual who enjoyed no political status or governmental position take place ? Justice Gupta gives the answer in his report :

> From the interest taken by men from the Prime Minister's secretariat and the way even matters connected with the country's defence were subordinated to the interest of Maruti Limited and the prevailing sense of fear that prompted implicit obedience, one is left in no doubt as to the origin of the power that made such a state of affairs possible. Mr. Sanjay Gandhi exercised only a derivative power, its source was the authority of the Prime Minister.

Gupta Commission Report is a narration of misuse of the Prime Minister's office, subordination of defence needs, coercion of businessmen and traders to invest money or give deposits to Maruti, making of wrong statements by ministers on the floor of Parliament, use of fraudulent means to raise funds for the car project and the siphoning off of the money to the two predominantly family-owned private limited companies, wide-ranging irregularities and violation of all established procedures with the sole purpose of helping Sanjay.

Believing that she had consolidated her position and India was at her feet, Indira Gandhi thought of establishing family rule. She gave indications of making Sanjay Gandhi as her successor. He was encouraged to jump into the political arena and head the caucus. Both the activities of slum clearance and sterilization were conducted under his supervision. Sanjay rose like a meteor in the political firmament after imposition of the emergency. Next only to the Prime Minister, he became powerful without having any lawful stand or official status. He toured the country and wherever he went ministers, state dignitaries and high officials gave him red carpet reception. One chief minister

demeaned himself by carrying his shoes in a public function to please the Prime Minister. Lakhs of rupees were spent from public exchequer on such occasions in the states. For example, Rs. 20.49 lakhs were expended on his tours in the U.P.

One politician Amrita Nahata, moved by the sordid practices, produced a film entitled "Kissa Kursi Ka" (Tale of the Chair) in which capture and maintenance of power were criticised and ridiculed in general. Considering it to be an attack on emergency rule, Sanjay Gandhi allegedly got hold of the film and assisted by V.C. Shukla, I.B. Minister, destroyed the negatives and other material of the film in the premises of the Maruti. Under Janata rule, the police launched a case against both of them on this charge and both were convicted by a comptent court and sentenced to a term of two years rigorous imprisonment.

Sanjay's misbehaviour repelled self-respecting and thinking sections. As was subsequently discovered many in the Congress camp too were disgusted though they were timid and afraid to utter a word in protest so long as cmergency lasted. Semi-educated and immature, Sanjay talked like a spoilt child and behaved as an unmannerly bumpkin. He became a great liability to his mother but in her deep affection for him she could not realize it.

Sanjay's two cronies among the central cabinet ministers were Bansi Lal who had been elevated, at his recommendation, to be the Defence Minister of the country and S.C. Shukla, Information and Broadcasting Minister. Bansi Lal is a sadist of a very low order. He took great pleasure in inflicting cruelty. His misdeeds were innumerable, some of them unspeakable. For example, in Rewasa village of Haryana State, Bansi Lal's son had a quarrel with a young man resulting in the arbitrary arrest of the latter's whole family. Under Bansi Lal's instructions the imprisoned men and women were mercilessly beaten; one grownup brother and sister were stripped and forced to lie down together stark naked. On coming to know of the shameful incident people of the nearby 92 villages took a vow to avenge the disgrace by destroying

Bansi Lal.

After the fall of Indira Gandhi Government, an enquiry into the atrocities perpetrated by Bansi Lal was held under orders of Janata Government by Justice Jagmohan Reddy who found him guilty of many criminal deeds. It is not possible to enumerate them one by one. As a sample one of them may be given here in the words of Justice Reddy as mentioned in his Report :

> All this is a sad story of the fiendish manner in which a citizen has been pursued, persecuted and humiliated and how his properties were demolishcd and razed to the grouud . . . Apart from the Ghanta Ghar, shops etc. being demolished, even religious institutions and samadhis . . . . were not spared. The idols were thrown out and the *Shivlinga* broken through and bulldozed . . . . On the evidence, it appears clear that the destruction was not at thc instance of the Bhiwani Improvement Trust. The demolitions, were however, at the instance of Shri Bansi Lal who as Chief Minister and subsequently as Defence Minister being frustrated at not obtaining the properties for his son Shri Surrendra Singh, and his brother, Shri Raghubir Singh, to build a five-star hotel and an air-conditioned cinema by them abused his position as a person in authority, and with vindictiveness, malice and cussedness, had their properties demolished through Shri R.S. Verma, Deputy Commissioner of Bhiwani.

Shukla was vain, impervious to reason and mean. His dealings with pressmen and film-makers were despicable. Whenever he met an honest and daring journalist it inevitably ended in humiliation of the latter. It was, however, not surprising because even veteran journalists cringed and crawled when served with peremptory instructions laid down by the Prime Minister.

Shukla too has been found by investigations to be responsible for a number of misdeeds on the basis of which cases have been launched by the police against him in different law courts.

Whatever reputation Indira Gandhi had earned for being a liberal, tactful and intelligent ruler was reduced to ashes by Sanjay's misdemeanour. No one in the Congress Party or

officialdom with an iota of good sense or dignity could bear his foul language or arrogant attitude.

However, with his mother's blessings, Sanjay moved to the centre of political stage and rapidly took over full control of all levers of power by the end of 1975. The unprecedented repression gave life an unreal character. What was apparent did not present the truth which had gone underground. Indira Gandhi had, no doubt, established and organized more than one secret service under her personal supervision to keep herself posted with minutest details of developments in the country but she failed to know the truth. She refused to learn from history that frightened people never reveal their mind and no one is prepared to relate unvarnished facts to a dictator. What reached her ears through the private intelligence was what she wanted to hear. Thus while unrest, disaffection and anger against the Congress Government were simmering in the hearts of people, the Prime Minister and her confidants were lulled into belief that with the exception of an insignificant section consisting mostly of intelligentsia, the entire nation supported the emergency regime and appreciated the drastic measures adopted to suppress opposition.

This finding was far from being correct, at any rate by the middle of 1976. Undoubtedly in the beginning of the emergency rule when Sanjay and his chums had not started their depradations and certain steps had been vigorously taken to safeguard the interests of poorer and peace-loving classes, multitudes uninterested in politics supported Indira Gandhi. But the tide gradually turned when high handedness became the order of the day and there was no justice at any level in the administration. Harsh rule is a corollary of dictatorship to which India had been virtually reduced under the emergency ; the greater the harshness the more widespread became the unpopularity of the Government and antipathy towards Indira Gandhi.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A Striking Expostulation

The emergency had been imposed on the entire country, but it did not operate equally ferociously in all the states. Some of them were ruled by non-Congress parties where expression of dissent was allowed to a certain extent in the Press as well as in public meetings. This became intolerable to the Union Government and move was set afoot to browbeat the non-Congress governments and in the last resort depose them on one pretext or another. Two of the states, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, were considered trouble spots. Accusing DMK Government of misrule the Centre arbitrarily took over the administration in Tamil Nadu on January 31, 1976, though it enjoyed the support of the majority in the State Legislative Assembly. A month later similar action was taken with regard to the Gujarat Government by declaring that it was incapable of carrying on the administration. Both the states were put under the President's rule.

Beginning from June 28—barely three days after imposition of the emergency—anti-Government newsletters and leaflets were produced and widely circulated bringing every act of atrocity, cruelty, barbarity and high-handedness of the Government and its officials to the notice of the public. These were avidly read. A number of opposition politicians who had managed to go abroad issued statements describing the simmering situation in India and imploring democrats and freedom lovers all over the world to come to the rescue of the benighted land. A periodical called *Swaraj* was published in England containing these statements as well as articles critical of the emergency regime appearing in the foreign Press. Such activity did not go in vain but attracted notice in the Western countries where many well known public

figures expressed sympathy with suppressed Indians. *Swaraj* was regularly despatched to Indian readers under closed covers and every issue caused a stir; it was passed from hand to hand and read with keen interest; it deepened disaffection.

BBC tapping its vast resources played an honourable role in broadcasting reports about political developments and suppressed facts about life in India under the emergency. The Indians hungry for news heard BBC and believed it more than AIR and TV which both lost credibility. The greater the repression to which the Government resorted the more receptive became the Indian mind to anti-Indira Gandhi propaganda from whichever source it emanated. Even exaggerated and perceptibly false publicity against her regime was welcome and easily digested. The Government could not effectively counteract the world wide propaganda, how hard it would try, and its prestige plummeted. The days had passed when people used to talk and hold discussions about the gains of emergency.

Small resistance groups from different opposition parties were functioning in many parts of the country from the outset after imposition of the emergency and enthusiasts offered themselves for arrest on different issues in the traditional way of the freedom struggle. Some of them resorted to violence, lawlessness and incendiarism. A few were involved in what came to be known as Baroda Dynamite Case in which two of the accused were George Fernandes (now Minister for Industry) and G.K.R. Reddy. When politicians recovered from the shock of the emergency and common people felt disenchanted with its gains by the end of 1975, an increasing number of patriots joined the struggle. Thousands of volunteers were prepared to court imprisonment on June 26, 1976, to celebrate, in their own way, the first anniversary of the declaration of the emergency. The state governments too were ready to accommodate the law breakers in school and college buildings (because jails had already overflown with prisoners) which were available due to summer vacation for being temporarily converted into prisons. The anniversary thus became a testing day for both sides only to reveal that

while Goverment's influence was on the decline opposition was gaining strength.

By the end of 1976, it was obvious that the emergency rule could not last for long. Realizing it but still sure that the large majority of the people appreciated the draconian measures and admired her courage in dealing drastically with the deteriorated political and economic situation in 1975, Indira Gandhi thought of legitimising her doings by securing free approval of the country. This could be done by holding unfettered and fair elections of the Lok Sabha. Her democratic self had momentarily awakened and she resolved to take the risk of which she was not afraid. There was stubborn opposition from the caucus. But two reasons prevailed on the Prime Minister to pursue her own proposal. She belongs, as stated earlier, to the revisionist school of Gandhism which while adhering to ancient Hindu culture, has imbibed a spirit of democracy under the British rule and is reluctant to altogether abandon it. Dictator as she had come to be called, she still retained faith in the sanctity of free vote. Puritan Gandhians and staunch communalist Hindus have not been fair to her in the assessment of this element in her character. But as has been acknowledged even by her traducers she made no efforts to rig the elections which were impartial, free and fair. That was the big difference between her fascism and that of Hitler. The British Prime Minister Mr. Callaghan on his visit to Delhi in 1978, met her and paid a glowing tribute to her for the daring act.

The scond reason for her insistence on seeking the approval of the people was the favourable reports received by her from the different intelligence agencies and the secret service. She was assured that the preponderating majority of the enfranchised people would in all probability cast their votes for her candidates. The stark fact that the cruel suppression and its accompanying atrocities had undermined her popularity and given rise to a wave of anger against her, at any rate in Northern India, was deliberately or under a mistaken belief, concealed from her. One month after the elections she admitted that she had been ill-informed and the

intelligence succeeded in misguiding her and causing her defeat.

Taking courage in both hands, Indira Gandhi sprang a surprise on the night of January 18, 1977, by suddenly announcing in a unscheduled telecast from TV that the President had been advised to dissolve the Lok Sabha and order fresh elections. Characteristically she did not consult her cabinet colleagues. It was a red letter day in the history of India. The unexpected announcement electrified the entire country. Frustrated opposition leaders and imprisoned politicians could hardly believe that such an announcement had been made. Misgivings were frequently expressed in the following days that the elections would not and could not be free and impartial as assured by the Prime Minister. Baffled and disunited, the opposition parties were dumbfounded and unable to understand how to react and respond. Some leaders stressed that the elections should be boycotted as, in the circumstances, defeat for opposition was inevitable and a foregone conclusion. Some others demanded three to six months for preparation; a number of conditions were put forward from various quarters which the Government was asked to fulfil in order to furnish proofs that the Prime Minister's announcement was sincere and the election would be unfettered and impartial.

On her part, Indira Gandhi reiterated what she had solemnly declared in the telecast. In a phased manner she withdrew one after another the restrictions placed on free expression of views on burning topics in the Press as well as on the platform; nothing was barred from public discussion. All the prisons were gradually emptied of political workers with the exception of the few who were charged of violence or of acts involving moral turpitude.

The Prime Minister had thrown a challenge which the opposition could ignore to accept at its own peril. The election dates were fixed—March 16 for some states and March 19 and 20 for others. Every day was precious and puritan Gandhians could ill afford to waste time in quarrels, squabbles and useless talk. The need of the hour for them was to unite.

A STRIKING EXPOSTULATION

In the beginning of 1977 there were in India seven political parties at the national level and seventeen parties functioning in the states. There was hardly any cohesion among the opposition groups. In pre-emergency days all attempts at their unification had borne no fruit. The condition had not improved by January 1977. But the fear of Indira Gandhi returning to power sent a shiver down the spine of every opposition leader and worker; they must combine, they believed, or they will perish. Nevertheless, but for the indefatigable, consistent endeavours of Jayaprakash Narayan, ailing as he was, unity of opposition would not have fructified. Jayaprakash had the reputation of being the sincerest living disciple of the Mahatma and therefore the puritan among puritans. He was also credited with being selfless and not, like all others, hungry for governmental power; his sacrifices during the days of freedom struggle were unforgotten and remembered with gratitude. Where others had failed, Jayaprakash succeeded in roping in four popular opposition parties enjoying national stature, namely, Bhartiya Lok Dal (BLD), Congress (O), Socialist Party and Jan Sangh (RSS) to form a new organisation named Janata Party. The immediate aim was to defeat Indira Gandhi at the hustings, disprove her invincibility and shatter her authoritarian power. In the course of election process many Congressmen found the ship of the Congress sinking and deserted it like rats: the arch-opportunist, Jagjivan Ram, Minister for Agriculture, who, it will be recalled, had moved the Emergency Resolution in the Lok Sabha and got it adopted by the House, shamelessly left Indira Gandhi, formed a new group called "Congress for Democracy" and joined the Janata Party.

Considering the antecedents of the five constituents of Janata Party there was no identity of aims and no similarity of ideologies. It was astounding to see Jan Sangh (RSS) being welcomed by the other four groups as a close comrade-in-arms in the struggle waged in the name of Mahatma Gandhi. Since the birth of Jan Sangh it had been consistently dubbed

as antinational, communal, and fascist by the rest; it was shunned as enemy of secularism and democracy. It was held responsible for the murder of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation. As a matter of fact, RSS was banned after that great tragedy for a period. Foremost among its detractors were Jayaprakash Narayan, Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram who now led Janata Party and not only exonerated Jan Sangh of its heinous past but also issued certificates that the Sangh was secular in character, a progressive, nationalist and democratic organization devoted to liberation of Indian people from authoritarianism and dictatorship.

Jan Sangh is the political wing of RSS and inseparable from it. Unlike other four constituents of Janata, it is a well knit organization with a loyal and dependable cadre of zealous and fanatic workers. Wherever it has a *shakha* (branch) parades in army-fashion are held and volunteers taught to follow the leaders blindly in fascist style. No women are allowed to participate in these exercises.

Therefore, every Jan Sanghi who joined the Janata espoused dual loyalty; it was primarily to RSS and secondarily to Janata Party. The fundamental philosophy and cardinal principles governing the thinking and conduct of RSS and Jan Sangh are the same. If Jan Sangh joined the Janata it was because immediately the common objective of the five constituents was destruction of the Congress rule by overthrowing Indira Gandhi. Jan Sanghis loathed revisionist Gandhians much more than the puritans and this impelled them to close in embrace. Both are ardent admirers of ancient Brahmin culture and keenly desirous of destroying root and branch the new rationalist-scientific values spread by the British in their days.

RSS was founded by one Dr. Hedgewar in mid-twenties at Nagpur, the stormcentre of Hindu orthodoxy; it started as an extremist Hindu body with a clear conception of its goal to make India a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Religious State) based on ancient Vedic culture utilising the unswerving services of an organised body of disciplined, trained and fanatic workers. In the forties it attained maturity under Professor M.S.

Golwalkar affectionately called "Guruji". Explaining the political philosophy of the RSS, Guruji succinctly said in his *Bunch of Thoughts*: "The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture... (a non-Hindu) may stay in the country wholly subordinate to thc Hindu nation, claiming or deserving no privileges or any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights."

Golwalkar refused to accept Muslims as the son's of Indian soil. Though he included Christians, Buddhists and Jains also in the category of non-Hindus he was particularly harsh on the Muslims. He observed : "What has our good behaviour towards the Muslim people brought us? Nothing but destruction of our holy places or enslavement of our people". Golwalkar was opposed to democracy because it equates the superior race of Hindus with the Muslims, the Christians and members of other minorities.

Golwalkar admired feudal spirit and honoured feudal system and its values which he was unwilling to disturb. Such ideas are found running throughout the RSS literature and Jan Sanghis staunchly hold to them in their thinking and conduct.

In view of these glaring facts secularists and democrats were taken by utter surprise despite their hatred of Indira Gandhi, to see the puritan Gandhians embracing Jan Sanghis to form the Janata Party. It was baffling to many politically conscious and liberal Indians.

In my opinion, however, this was a superficial reading of the new development in Indian politics. Basically Jan Sanghis and Gandhian nationalists of various hues are not different or opposed to each other; they stem from the same tree and have a common root. All look backwards to ancient Brahmin culture for inspiration and seek spiritual sustenance from medieval institutions and traditions. Taken to its logical ends the Mahatma's philosophy as enunciated in *Hind Swaraj* will assume the shape of *Bunch of Thoughts* by Golwalkar. Repeated insistence of Gandhi on secularism and sympathy

with non-Hindu minorities had no significance than a shrewd move to gain support of world democrats in struggle for freedom from British Imperialism. That objective having been achieved the Mahatma's disciples feel no need for keeping aloof from their spiritual and cultural allies. In the shape of Janata Gandhism come out in its true colours. It stood for superiority of Hindu culture and Hindu race.

The opposition of RSS to Gandhism was not fundamental but due to the latter's pretended liberalism. Shorn of that frill, Gandhian political philosophy is more accurately interpreted and represented by RSS; the outlook is similar, the approach the same. If anything, RSS is more sincere, forthight, outspoken and honest in presenting the philosophy of revivalism and fascism than the Mahatma and his disciples who never had the courage to preach it openly. This explains how and why the JanaSangh (RSS) bowed for the first time before the teachings of the patron-saint of Indian nationalism and the five groups agreed to come under one umbrella to form the Janata Party.

The formal announcement of the Janata Party was made on January 20, 1977. It was an intellectual, spiritual and moral triumph of Jan Sangh (RSS). Its leaders were not far from truth in believing that joining the Janata was the first step towards capture of power by them after immediately routing Indira Gandhi and later on contriving by diverse means the subjugation or annihilation one by one of the four partners in the adventure. The idea was mooted that the constituents of the Janata should dissolve their organisations, forget their identities and get merged in the Janata to make the opposition really united and strong. For lack of time and to allow the parties to calmly think over the proposition, a final decision on the issue was postponed until after the elections. As we shall see the idea did not bear the desired fruit and Janata could not become an integral body but functioned as a federation of the five groups which continued to maintain separate identities.

With the formation of the Janata Party its leaders at once applied themselves to the task of making preparations to

fight elections. They launched a fierce attack on the Congress Government and chose Indira Gandhi as their main target. The pitch had already been queered for the Congress by the misdeeds of Indira caucus during the emergency and the hurdles in the path of Janata leaders were not unsurmountable as one would imagine. Nevertheless, a manifesto promising restoration of democracy, free Press and civil rights, removal of grievances, fulfilment of demands at least some of which must have appeared unrealizable to the meanst understanding, was issued to secure votes. Emphasis in the manifesto was laid on revival of Gandhism—its assertion of ancient Indian culture, deprecation of western scientific values though not of its material gains and ill informed ideas about village economy, to catch the imagination of the ignorant, backward and gullible people. Some sensible notions were thrown in here and there to appease the intellectuals but on the whole the manifesto assured to usher in a utopia—an Indian edition of it—the perfect, all-giving and unconquerable Ram Rajya of Gandhi's conception.

The Janata manifesto affirmed the party's dedication "to the task of building up a democratic and socialist State in India, drawing inspiration from our rich heritage and the noble traditions of our struggle for independence." Strongly rejecting the Congress theory that freedom was a luxury in a backward, developing country it stressed its faith in the fact "that fundamental freedoms are weapons that the oppressed and the poor need to fight tyranny, exploitation and injustice, vested interests and opportunistic governments. Bread cannot be juxtaposed against liberty. The two are inseparable". The political charter of the Janata Party said : "It will restore to the citizens the fundamental freedoms and the judiciary its rightful role."

The other highlights of the manifesto could be summarized in these words :

The Party will honestly implement land legislation, provide machinery for scrutinising fraudulent transfers and plug such loopholes as have come to light. Steps will be taken to see that minimum incomes rise rapidly so that the

differences between the minimum and maximum after levy of tax is reduced to 1 : 20. It will not stop at that but will strive progressively further to reduce this differential to 1 : 10 within a decade by a policy of income redistribution that raises floor levels and discourages bloated incomes. The prices of essential commodities will not be allowed to rise beyond the capacity of the common man to pay.

The manifesto laid great emphasis on the Party's belief to tread the path of Gandhian socialism. Obviously hypocrisy and demagogy played a considerable part in drafting of the manifesto which was to be issued in the name of the five constituents whose views were divergent but who had to make a show of unanimity to secure votes.[1]

Very few cared to closely read the manifesto, much less analyse its contents and try to understand how far it was realistic or met the needs of Indian people in the last quarter of the twentieth century. To millions whose wounds inflicted by the atrocities of Indira-Sanjay caucus and its hirelings were still raw, overthrow of Indira Gandhi Government would be sufficient recompense. The harried people received the Janata leaders with acclamation when they made extensive tours raising hopes that a golden age was destined to dawn if Janata Party was voted to power.

Meanwhile, Indira Gandhi got the opportunity to have a peep into the lacerated hearts of a substantial section of the Indians she had trodden over recklessly. She got an idea of the tremendous hostility she had to reckon with. Whether or not there is any truth in the report obviously spread by her opponents, that she contemplated on one protext or another, to postpone elections and once again resort to repression, she gave no indication of any change in her plan to submit herself to a popular verdict. To all intents and purposes, undaunted, she was resolved to give a heroic fight to the Janata obscurantists in the belief that the large

[1] Jagjivan Ram's "Congress for Democracy" became the fifth constituent when it joined the Janata Party sometime before the elections were held.

majority of the voters will support her on the day of her trial. Too proud to seek help, she decided to fight single handed ; she disdained to rely on social revolutionary forces ; she forgot the progressive role that history had called on her to play. Following in the footsteps of her father no doubt she had defied some medieval notions of Gandhi and done remarkable work in pushing India on path of modernity but when all is said and done, she could not rise above Gandhism and could not proceed beyond the revisionist stage However boastful in her claims, she was not a revolutionary. Like her puritan opponents she depended more on the gullibility, religiosity and ignorance of the Indian multitudes than on the rising secular forces of social revolution. She had little faith in Indian renaissance and enlightenment. The impending crucial test did not impel her to rise to higher moral and political plane but pushed her down to lower levels in the hope of achieving success at the polls.

Just then the periodic Kumbha Mela at Hardwar was on and millions of Hindus arrived from all over India to purify themselves by a dip in the holy Ganga. A big rally of the sadhus, the parasites of Hindu Society, was also held at the same place. In her hour of infirmity, Indira Gandhi thought of securing religious props from the ancient *tirtha* (holy place). Dressed in a saffron-coloured sari (to fraternise with ochre-robed sadhus), she attended the mela and addressed the rally. She obtained plenty of blessings from religion-ridden Hindus and the godmen. She was compared with Mother-Goddess for her arduous work in having raised Bharat and vindicated dharma. She returned to New Delhi "spiritually" elevated and equipped with a few *rudraksha malas* round her neck. The pilgrimage was followed by her visits to many popular temples and shrines partly to demonse trate that she was no less a religious devotee than her puritan opponents and partly also in the belief that worship caused mircles to achieve success. Which would show that qualitatively revisionists are no different from puritans; the fervour of modernity of the former is only skin deep and disappears at the testing time.

Nevertheless, with iron determination Indira Gandhi launching the election campaign of the Congress party, visited every state and nearly all districts in the country. She daily addressed dozens of public meetings some of which were attended by big crowds. She was cheered, applauded, glorified and also pelted with stones ; occasionally chappals were hurled at her. Her courage, presence of mind and disregard for violence of hostile audiences were astounding ; her self control was exemplary. In post-independence days India had never witnessed a tumultuous election like it nor unprecedented hectic activities of politicians.

Like other backward nations, Indians live on illusions which the demagogic leaders manipulate to create for them. When one illusion is shattered through experience gained in the world of reality another is produced not unoften by the same leadership, upon which public minds are fed. The latest in the series of illusions was the one generated by Janata leaders that the issue involved in the Lok Sabha election of March 1977 was the contest between democracy and dictatorship, Janata representing the former and the Congress standing for the latter.

Democracy and dictatorship are incompatible concepts. They do not hang in the air but are reailzed on the foundations of two philosophies which have nothing in common between them. The approach to life of a democrat is entirely different from the one adopted by a dictator. By a close and careful analysis of the basic aims and fundamental principles as well as the antecedents of a party one can assess whether it is pursuing the path of democracy or dictatorship.

Applying the criterion to the ruling Congress and the Janata Party, the two main contestants in the 1977 Lok Sabha election, it was clear that there was qualitatively no difference between them. In essence they are similar ; both belong to the same school of neo-Brahmin philosophy ; both swear by Gandhism and admire the anachronistic medieval social system. Indeed, during the tussle the rulers vied with the opposition leaders in claiming to be the true and loyal follow-

ers of the Mahatma and the guardian angels of the Hindu cultural heritage. In their respective election manifestos they did disagree on details but their political philosophy and ultimate aims were couched in similar terms; if anything, the Janata underlined that what they offer is the Gandhian alternative to Congress revisionism which alone can give both bread and liberty to the people.

There is no gainsaying that the revisionists had timorously strayed from some Gandhian notions in certain respects but philosophically they continued to be tied to the apron strings of the Mahatma; they did not display any extraordinary courage to start the direly needed social revolution by going the whole hog with modernity. It is a tragic story of men of scientific-rationalist culture being pulled back by revivalist and rectionary forces.

Ancient Hindu culture is founded on inequitous social order; it does not value a man or woman as a human being but as a unit of the caste in which he or she is born and should live, according to holy texts, until the last day of his or her earthly existence. It condemns people for actions performed in their supposed previous births and discourages them from fighting against buffets of misfortune or wrongs of society with their own efforts. The most profound secret taught by Hindu scriptures is that humanity is powerless to rid itself of the cankers eating into its vitals; only an avatar (incarnation of God) can destroy evil and promote good. Authoritarianism and dictatorship are inherent in such teachings. Gandhi as a sincere believer in Hindu philosophy had fully imbibed these traits in his thinking and behaviour. He, therefore, vigorously recommended Ram Rajya as the goal of Free India as it symbolished the Hindu culture. Having accepted Gandhian way of life, its revisionism nothwitstanding, the Congress under Indira Gandhi slowly but steadily came very close to the establishment of dictatorship. The hope that in the rise of Janata Party to power democracy has a chance to get established in India was to court gigantic self deception. The slogan that the contest in the election was between democracy and dictatorship sounded completely hollow.

The Lok Sabha elections—totally free, fair and impartial —were held as scheduled in March 1977, to the entire satisfaction of even the detractors of Indira Gandhi. The Congress was defeated; it secured no more than 153 seats out of 542. Remarkably, the redoubtable Prime Minister who ruled, by turns, with the full support of the people and by striking terror, for eleven years (1966-1977) was routed in her own constituency not by an outstanding public figure but by a light weight political worker notorious for his frivolity and bufoonery. She fell along with her upstart son. Sanjay, who was trounced in an adjacent constituency.

When the election results were published famous journals commented in a dignified manner. Acknowledging that the emergency had registered a few successes, the *Guardian*, London, pointed out :

> Mrs. Gandhi who had been a very good democratic politician, grew to be an amateur as a dictator. While she still saw that India could not be run without some kind of popular consent she was so isolated and surrounded by sycophants that she did not realize that she could no longer command it.

In her stance as a dictator, Indira had blundered into holding the election and Indian democracy for once escaped strangulation. The opposition had won. But it certainly was no revolution, partial or total. At best one could say that majority of the Indian people had made a telling protest against suppression and oppression resorted to by the Congress Government. It was a striking expostulation.

Making their own analysis of the election results the pro-Janata authors of *India's Ballot-Box Revolution*, observed:

> To interpret the verdict of the people this way does not suggest that democracy has struck roots in Indian soil; only the country has been given another opportunity to have an open society and return to democracy.[1]

What remains to be seen is how this opportunity was utilized by the new rulers, the Puritan Gandhians, who, let us not forget, included Jan Sangh (RSS).

[1] *Op. Cit.*, p. 417.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Blossoming of Ram Rajya (i)

In the elections to the Lok Sabha Janata Party captured the majority of seats—298 out of 542—with 43.17 per cent of the valid votes polled in its favour. The Congress votes had dropped from 43.68 per cent in 1971 to 34.54 per cent in 1977. The preponderating number of votes to Janata was cast in northern and central states as well as in Gujarat; it failed to achieve any notable success in South India and Bengal. It is remarkable that the states which supported Janata were mostly Hindi speaking, more orthodox, illiberal and obscurantist than the states which remained with the Congress. Nevertheless, there could be no doubt that the electorate had voted Janata to power thereby putting the destiny of India in the hands of puritan Gandhians including Jan Sangh (RSS), troubadours of fascism, counter-revolution and Hindu chauvinism.

Though Congress Party was still an important factor in Indian politics yet having been driven out of power, it lied low and, with dignity and decorum, Indira Gandhi bowed out of office, bade good bye to the nation while making a brief appearance on TV, retired to her home and sat quietly watching the developments.

The opponents of the defeated Prime Minister and their followers were overwhelmed with joy and enveloped in euphoria. It was claimed on flimsy arguments that India had been liberated a second time and a revolution had broken out. The puritans of course let the enraptured masses believe that blossoming of Ram Rajya was round the corner when streams of honey and milk would flow through length and breadth of Bharatvarsha and perfect order prevail under the benevolent rule of the honest and sincere followers of the Mahatma.

It was, however, not so easy to give a start to the Janata regime; the sclection of the leader of the Janata Parliamentary Party posed a tough problem; there were more than one contenders for the post. Before the choice was made all the elected members of Lok Sabha on Janata ticket were escorted to Mahatma's *samadhi* at Raj Ghat in New Delhi where Jayaprakash Narayan administered in the Gandhian tradition an oath to them that they will remain honest, selfless and true to the principles of the freedom struggle in discharging their responsibilities as members of the Lok Sabha. It was conveniently forgotton that such oaths had been unhelpful in the past and any person could and did break the pledge if and when he or she desired to achieve selfish ends. Nothing stops a person not true to his word from easily breaking an oath. Thereafter, bypassing dissensions which were known to exist among the constituent groups forming the Janata Party. and with the aim of presenting a pleasant image of the Party to 650 million Indians and to the world, two elder politicians—Jayaprakash Narayan and J.B. Kripalani—manoeuvred to secure a concensus of opinion about the leader. Not without causing some heart burning, Morarji Desai, the octogenarian old war horse of the freedom struggle and life-long puritan Gandhian whose prominent qualifications were adherence to outmoded medieval ideas, orthodoxy, rigidity and self-righteousness, was accepted by "consensus" as leader of the Party which automatically made him the fourth Prime Minister of the Indian Republic.

Janata Party was finally inaugurated on May 1, 1977, when Jagjivan Ram's Congress for Democracy declared its decision to join as the fifth constituent of the new body. On this occasion the Indian nation was solemnly assured that the leaders of the five constituents had agreed to disband their respective organisations and get totally merged in the Janata Party.

Assuming the power by the end of March 1977, the Janata Government lost no time in vigorously dealing with the pledges it had given in its election manifesto of restoring

democracy by revoking the unjust and anti-people acts passed by the previous regime. It would have been fatuous to expect that the huge task would be accomplished with a magic wand within days or even weeks after taking over charge of the administration. Nevertheless, it was not beyond expectation that some effective steps would be immediately taken to restore civil rights and individual liberties within days. No doubt the Congress Government had for the sake of holding unfettered and impartial elections relaxed many harsh measures but the Janata Government provided ample proof that it was seriously engaged in putting democracy back on the rails at any rate in the first phase of its rule. The censorship of the Press was withdrawn forthwith enabling correspondents and editors to report or comment on any issue without any fear or favour as in pre-emergency days.

The Janata Government appointed a committee chaired by the distinguished journalist, B.G. Verghese, to recommend after due enquiry how the AIR and TV could be converted into autonomous bodies under a corporation because there was a general complaint that these two powerful vehicles of publicity, being under sole control of the Government, were misused by the ruling party.

The Congress Government had turned Parliament into the supreme power of the country through a Constitution Amendment Act; the authority of the judiciary had been undermined by making it subservient to the executive. The 22nd Amendment to the Constitution which made democracy a sham was the worst of all. The executive under Indira Gandhi's dictatorship was uncontrolled master of the country. The Janata Government through 44th Amendment to the Constitution reversed most of the anti-people legislations which had been adopted by the previous Congress government. Among other provisions of the Amendment which came into force in June, 1979, the following were notable :

(a) Removal of disparities in terms of income opportunity and status of the people.

(b) Restoration of the authority of the Supreme Court in respect of the election dispute of the President and the

Vice-President, which had been taken away by the Constitution (39th Amendment) Act.

(c) The President to act in accordance with the advice of the Council of Ministers once he asked for reconsideration of such advice and the Council was not prepared to make any changes.

(d) Restoration of the power of the courts to compel execution of rules relating to transaction of the business of the Union and the state governments.

(e) Restoration of five year term of the Lok Sabha in place of six year term as adopted by the previous Congress Government.

(f) Restoration of the original jurisdiction of the Election Commission in respect of decisions regarding disqualification of members of Parliament and state legislatures.

(g) Restoration of the jurisdiction of courts with regard to the power of the President and the Governors to promulgate ordinance during recess of the houses.

(h) Restoration of the original power and jurisdiction of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India in respect of the accounts of the Union and the states. He will have the power of superintendence, control and scrutiny of such financial transactions.

(i) Restoration of the original jurisdiction of the Election Commission in respect of the decision of the Governor on disqualification of members of the state legislatures under Article 192.

(j) Removal of distortions in the appointment and conditions of the office of Judge of High Court.

(k) Restoration of the jurisdiction of High Courts in revenue matters.

(l) Restoration of the power of superintendence of the Supreme Court over all courts including tribunals appointed by High Courts.

(m) Deletion of provision for assistance to states by deployment of armed forces or other forces of the Union.

(n) Removal of bar to interference by courts in electoral matters of Prime Minister and Speaker of Lok Sabha.

(o) Provision of safeguard so that the kind of emergency that people witnessed during 1975-1977 can never take place again.

(p) Limitation of President's rule in ordinary circumstances to one year.

(q) Citizens' right to life and personal liberty cannot be suspended even during an emergency.

(r) Censorship cannot be imposed on the Press in respect of reporting of the proceedings of Parliament and state legislatures.

In the weeks following their assumption of power the puritan Gandhians provided evidence that their claims of reviving democracy and redeeming the pledges given in their manifesto were not insincere. Not only was the liberty to criticise the rulers fully utilised by the Press, it was for the first time after withdrawal of emergency that AIR and TV besides giving fullest publicity to the work done by the Janata Government and its officials in diverse fields also covered to a considerable extent the activities of the opposition.

One of the most publicised features of Janata Government's policy was appointment of various commissions of enquiry under the provision of the Constitution to investigate the misuse of power, irregularities and excesses committed by persons in authority before and during emergency. The Commission whose proceedings got high publicity, attracted attention and was keenly followed by people in India and abroad, was the one presided over by J.C. Shah, a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, which started functioning from September 29, 1977. I have earlier quoted from this report. It was an insistent and common demand that the culprits who had wounded democracy, subverted Constitution, spread terror, imprisoned thousands without trial, inflicted atrocities and made life of innocent citizens miserable, should not go unpunished.

To see the puritans obviously imbued with a democratic spirit, intent on cleaning the demoralised administration, restoring liberty in every sphere of social life and behaving as progressive modernists was pleasantly baffling. Had the leopared

changed its stripes? Or was this policy reluctantly pursued under tremendous pressure of public opinion which had been roused, albeit temporarily, by force of circumstances? Or was it to impress upon the people that Congress authoritarianism had ended for good and Gandhian Ram Rajya had replaced it under the Janata rule? Or, again, were the democratic and egalitarian forces fostered under the Buddhist and the British rules reasserting themselves?

It did not take more than a few months for the illiterate multitudes and educated elite to get disillusioned. When the Janata leaders felt sure that they were secure in the saddle the real nature of the neo-Brahmin culture started asserting itself. To begin with, the five constituent bodies forming the Janata Party not only refused to abandon their identities, dissolve their groups and get totally merged in the new body but also at every step they took decisions separately before discussig important issues as members of Janata. Everyone of the five constituents endeavoured to secure lion's share disproportionate to its strength in the spoils of office. Merit was of no concern. BLD and Jan Sangh tried to dominate, the former clumsily the latter cleverly. Not infrequently the interests of different bodies clashed which led to infighting. The Janata Party, therefore, developed not as a single unit or a united party but as a federation of five organisations with no well chalked out or definite programme for the welfare of the people but as a band of men aimlessly holding political power. The one thing which kept the group, togeher was the fear of reemergence of the Congress in a big way on the political scene. In an intelligent assessment of the Janata Party Mrs. Gandhi compared it to an orange externally one but internally divided, the rind in the shape of fear of fall keeping the parts together.

While in opposition Janata leaders not content with denouncing Congress rulers as enemies of Indian culture and democracy, doled out plans and schemes which in their opinion, would put the country on the path of freedom envisioned during the struggle against British imperialism. But coming to power it was discovered by the stalwarts among

them to their own dismay and consternation that they neither individually nor collectively possessed even a single original idea or a creative scheme to work upon and thereby blaze a new trail. They were bewildered and confused unable to push forward or move backward. They dare not publicly espouse scientific-technological culture having always in the past sneered at it as exotic nor could they secure any inspiration from ancient Brahmin civilization to tackle the pressing national problems. They were, therefore, compelled to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors ; the plans for industrialization already in operation were allowed to drag on and some more whose blue prints had already been prepared by the Congress regime, were ordered to be completed. This was totally against the economic theories of the Mahatma. Unwillingly and therefore tardily the puritans too defied the mentor as revisionists had done before them for three decades. But there was neither conviction nor zest in what the puritans were doing; it was done haphazardly and inefficiently.

The Planning Commission was to be reoriented and instructions were issued that all its schemes were to be drawn in the Gandhian spirit as declared in the election manifesto. What that meant nobody could clearly visualise or comprehend. A couple of academics who had produced worthless treatises on Gandhian economics were honoured with membership of the Planning Commission. The work of the Commission became a jumble of absurdities which failed to remove the obstacles in the path of India's progress.

To demonstrate that they were qualitatively different from the Congress governments and truly Gandhian in approach to national problems, the Janata leaders talked differently and made a show of planning differently. If Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi laid greater stress on industrialisation and paid less attention to agriculture (though the Green Revolution broke out during Indira Gandhi's rule which doubled the production of foodgrains), Janata leaders attributed all ills of Indian nation to the neglect by their predecessors of the vast rural areas which were of great concern to the Mahatma. "Back to the villages" was the slogan and

the Janata leaders vied with each other in raising it. Surely they talked *ad nauseum* on the subject of rural reconstruction but like their romantic mentor they had no clear ideas what they meant by it ; their conceptions were hazy and by no means workable. They were, therefore, only successful in worsening the economic situation in the country by tampering with the delicate fabric.

The Janata leaders rejected the concept of Five-Year Plans ; already five such plans had been implemented, however inadequately, by the previous governments. The Janata leaders did not altogether abandon the notion of planning but in order to demonstrate their originality instead of calling it a Five-Year Plan, in any case to start with, they called it a Rolling Plan. The adoption of the system by the end of 1977 was announced with fanfare ; it raised a fierce controversy which could not be silenced because the government spokesmen themselves were not very clear about what the Rolling Plan meant. They were on the defence and, therefore, gave contradictory explanations with the result that the idea was whittled down and finally dumped into the limbo of history. Accused of abondoning the planning, the Janata leaders hastily resorted to the old system but, formulating the sixth Five-Year Plan, adopted annual planning; they insisted that it be given rural bias to show that Janata Party was profoundly interested in the backward and neglected millions in the six hundred thousand villages than in the well to do urban areas.

There was no doubt some improvement in the first year. The high rate of economic growth in 1977-78 was mainly on account of the spurt in agricultural production following a low level output in 1976-77. Although industrial production in 1977-78 rose by only 3.65 per cent, agricultural production rose by 10.7 per cent. But a setback appeared next year. According to the Planning Commission the overall economic growth rate in 1978-79 was only 3.9 per cent against the target of 4.7 per cent envisaged in the draft Five-Year Plan (1978-83).[1]

[1] *The Indian Express*, May 10, 1979.

It is not surprising that the puritans were loath to expand industrialisation which the Mahatma considered an evil but since it had been given a good start by Nehru and provided employment for millions besides supplying consumer goods on an extensive scale, it was impossible to stop its expansion, the world forces in its favour were irresistible. The Janata leaders had, therefore, to go along with it, however unwillingly ; the progress could not be reversed. Puritans went from one developed country to another to seek assistance for starting new industries and expanding the old ones. Morarji Desai successfully persuaded USSR to give this country a credit of Rs. 2500 crores to establish a steel mill at Vaishakhapatnam.

However, subconsciously feeling defeated on moral plane and not having their heart in industrialization, puritans mismanaged economy; signs were not wanting to show that increasingly industries in both public and private sectors were becoming sick. In 1979 their number had reached 136.

According to the estimates of Central Statistical Organization the index of industrial production recorded a zero rate of growth during April-August, 1979. Steel output fell by 8 per cent, cement by 2 per cent and sugar by as much as 35 per cent[1].

A special international standing panel which judges the investment climate in each country by weighing 15 criteria reported that India's ranking in the world investment market came down in the second quarter of 1979; it had 41st place in a list of 45.[2]

Declared Dr. D. Lakadwala, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, : "There is unlikely to be growth in the Indian economy and per capita income will decline." He stressed that decline in production is responsible for rise in prices.[3]

The UNI News Agency reported on November 17, 1979,

[1] *The Indian Express*, September 2, 1979.

[2] *Ibid.*, August 28, 1979.

[3] *Indian Express*, November 22, 1979.

that "thirty-two years after independence, India is about 100 years behind the developed countries in terms of per capita income"[1].

A World Bank survey report removed India from the Third World and, along with some other developing countries, put it in a fourth world because it had slipped down into that position. The average income of common man already little had further decreased.[2]

Unmindful of the baneful effects of the policy of going back to villages in an unwise, haphazard manner, Charan Singh, Finance Minister, introduced the budget for 1979-80 in March with a scheme of taxes which caused heavy inflation. Although the government claimed that there would be only one per cent rise in prices a special survey by correspondents of the *Hindustan Times* all over the country showed that the low and middle classes had to suffer 15 per cent hike in prices of essential necessities of life in April and still there was no stability.[3] Balraj Mehta, a regular analyst of Indian economy, wrote on May 18, 1979, in the *Indian Express* :

> The vaunted price stability has taken such a severe beating in the last few weeks that portents of double digit inflation are beginning to loom large. The position indeed is reminiscent of the conditions in early 1974 which drove Mrs. Gandhi into launching a disastrous deflationary package of measures later in that year, paving the way to the imposition of Emergency next year.

Mehta added :

> The distressing part is that prices are not edging up because of forces beyond our control. The phenomenon is the direct result of inept handling and default in the management of economy.

When George Fernandes, Union Minister for Industry, tried to defend the inefficiency and ideology of the Govern-

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[1] *Ibid.*, November 17, 1979.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *The Hindustan Times*, May 2, 1979.

ment by blaming mixed economy calling it a bane, the renowned Industrialist, JRD Tata, retorted :

> If a bane is to be mentioned at all, it is that of those politicians who ignorant of practical industrial realities and obsessed by obsolete ideologies have, since independence, hamstrung and distorted the economic progress of the country.[1]

The faulty economic policy of puritans is well illustrated by the greater number of suffering millions who have gone below poverty line during the Janata regime. "At least 294 million people in the rural and urban areas", disclosed Fazhur Rehman, Minister of State for Planning, on May 3, 1979, in the Rajya Sabha, "were living below the poverty line under the norms adopted by the Planning Commission."[2]

According to the Planning Commission's estimate which is similar to the World Bank's concept of "poverty line" a person must at least earn Rs. 60 per month or Rs. 720 per annum to subsist.

The Economic and Scientific Research Foundation in a study of wholesale price statistics for the last three decades reported that the value of the rupee measured by the wholesale price index fell to less than 20 paise in 1977 as compared with 100 paise in 1947. In view of this those taken as living below poverty line can only be the people who starve and famish. It means that nearly forty-eight per cent of Indians live like this under the fullfledged Ram Rajya.

Applying this criteria, out of the estimated population in India of 650 millions about 374 million today are found to be living below the poverty line. Among them are 64 millions who arc landless labourers and form the hard core. Obviously the poverty is colossal. Not a moment's reflection is needed to believe that unless the back of this poverty is broken our country cannot rise as a progressive, prosperous nation. But the problem cannot be solved by any sentimental or emotional approach. The wretched poverty has been there for

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[1] *The Indian Express*, May 15, 1979.

[2] *The Hindustan Times*, May 4, 1979.

centuries when no means were available to destroy it. In the twentieth century science and technology have made it possible by opening countless avenues of gainful employment to tackle the problem. But the question is : can Gandhian leadership—revisionist or puritan—free their minds of the fads which hamstrung them to walk on the path of progress?

By raising demagogic slogans of going back to the villages and allocating thousands of crores in the budget for the welfare of the downtrodden peasantry what are the achievements of the Janata Government ?

According to the reports of the Rural Labour Enquiry Committee and the Planning Commission while agricultural labourers numberd 310 lakhs in 1964-65 the figure increased to 530 lakhs in 1977-78. The total labour force has been rising at the rate of 35 lakhs a year from 1740 lakhs in 1965-66 to 2230 lakhs in 1977-78. "This means", says Kuldip Nayar "that marginal farmers have been swelling the labour force; they have been forced to part with their land either because of new burdens or old debts. Apparently, the benefit of thousands of crores of rupees channelled to rural areas has gone to big farmers. They appear to have gained most from irrigation facilities, tubewells, fertilizers or roads."[1]

Y.B. Chavan, Deputy Prime Minister, told a convention organized by the Congress Socialists on August 8, 1979, that land ceiling laws had remained on paper only in several states.[2]

For poor peasants the size of land held by them has been shrinking; But in case of kulaks the reverse is the case. Despite the slogan that tillers must become the owners of the soil official figures denote that 22 per cent of rural households own no land at all; 25 per cent have fragments of less than one acre each; only 14 per cent own one acre to 2.5 acres. Thus 61 per cent of peasants own less than 8 per cent of the total land after more than three decades of independence and two and half years of puritan rule.

[1] *The Indian Express*, June 15, 1979.

[2] *The Statesman*, Aug. 9, 1979.

The number of landless peasants continues to increase by 15 lakhs a year; their earnings are progressively going down. Despite the emphasis in the sixth Five-Year Plan to raise rural millions from appalling conditions, the figures are eloquent about the failure of the Janata rule in this respect.

The revisionists launched a two-pronged attack to drive away the dreadful povery : First, through industrialization by utilising science and technology and, second, by improving agriculture. For reasons already discussed earlier it did not bring the expected success. Nevertheless, with proper amendments it was the only economic policy that could lead India to its goal of prosperity. Certainly this was not the Gandhian way but it was a realistic way and the sensible way. Looking backward and laying stress on seeking inspiration from antique Vedic civilisation, vitiated this outlook which ultimately brought about India's doom.

By misleading the downtrodden through demagogy and in the name of the Mahatma the puritan leaders resolved to reverse the Congress economic policy and preferred the primitive methods to raise the countryfolk.

Though they did not say so, the idea to industrialize India was not to their liking. Prime Minister Morarji Desai in terviewing Peter F. Drucker of *Wall Steel Journal*, and feigning profundity, emphasized : "small is beautiful", "rural development" and "appropriate (that is pre-industrial) technology" will save India. Hearing the views of other ministers and their advisors, Drucker exasperatingly remarked : "No one in India could tell me what the economic policy of the Government is. The only Government actions are expansion of already large governmental enterprises, unshackled growth of an already obese bureaucracy and more bureaucratic regulations. The cabinet cannot agree on anything and has no policy whatever. Substantial sums are being allocated to "the villages" but without programme, let alone goals. But there is a pervasive rhetoric of smallness and of anti-technology"[1].

[1] *The Wall Street Journal* March, 1979.

Unsurprisingly the puritans lacked interest in science and research. Devoted to ancient culture they, every now and then, declared that India would come into its own by adhereing to medieval values and by discarding Western ideals. "Some of the giant research institutions created by Jawaharlal Nehru", ruefully observed Dr. Jagjit Singh a well known scientist, "to realize his dream of modern India have become wasteful and unproductive because of lack of purposeful leadership and coordination, infighting and wrong orientation.[1]

Because corruption and nepotism prevailed in public undertakings more than anywhere else, most of them remained in the red from the start and have been a drag on public exchequer. Under the Janata rule the loss sustained by them increased. It was reported in May 1979 that as against a mammoth investment of Rs. 13000 crores put in the public sector, its net performance in 1979 (in the first year of Janata rule) showed a loss of Rs. 14 crores.

The Bureau of Public Enterprises made a preliminary assessment of the working of the public sector enterprises for 1978-79. Its findings were disconcerting. In the Heavy Engineering Corporation there had been a steep fall in production from Rs. 109 crores to Rs. 71 crores. The production of Metals and Allied Machinary Corporation declined from Rs 40 crores to Rs 26 crores. The Coal (India) Limited had incurred a record loss of Rs 182 crores in the current year. The loss suffered by Indian Iron and Steel Company was to the tune of Rs. 27 crores and the National Minerals Development Corporation's loss was Rs. 10 crores. The Shipping Corporation incurred losses amounting to Rs. 36 crores as against Rs. 15 crores in the previous year.

It may, however, be stated that some of the undertakings had done well because there was great demand for the goods produced by them in the country and abroad.

The Steel Authority of India had shown a profit of Rs 42 crores during the year. But this was mainly because of the

[1] *Nehru Memorial lecture delivered in New Delhi on May* 26, 1979.

revision in steel price effected by the authorities. It was admitted by the Government that no steel plant had achieved the target during the year.

The profits of some other units like the Cochin Refineries, Lubrizol (India), Indo-Burma Petroleum Corporation, the Indian Telephone Industry and the Hindustan Teleprinters showed reduced profits during the year. There was thus a setback in almost all the public undertakings.[1]

To make a frontal attack upon rural poverty two novel schemes were launched in some states : One is called Antyodaya and the other Food for Work. Both were started with fanfare and religious celebrations. It was claimed that they were successful and had benefited hundreds of thousands who were wallowing in penury and subsisted on inedible wild products.

Antyodaya was started in Rajasthan during 1977-78 and gradually spread to Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat. It was meant to financially help the poorest families in a village to stand on their own feet.

The aim of Food for Work programme was similar. Poorest men and women were encouraged to work by payment partly in cash but more in foodgrains. The officials in charge of the schemes reported that both had gained immense popularity and were very potential for mitigating poverty in rural areas.

But one has to be very cautious in entertaining the official estimation because in post-independence days it is not unusual to hear of the failure of schemes which were declared successful beyond doubt in the beginning. This has been especially the case with public undertakings and official programmes. For instance, coal industry was said to be flourishing after nationalization. But on May 25, 1979, it was given out that production has remained practically static since the industry's take over. "Authoritative sources say that this company (Bharat Coking Coal Ltd.) has been using a variety of statistical frauds to peg the output figures. The BCCL has

[1] *The Statesman*, September 24, 1979.

misled the ministries, the nation, the consumers and its own labourers."[1]

Writing about land reforms in Bihar, Arun Sinha made a startling observation in *Indian Express* on July 9, 1979 :

> The officials of land reforms and labour departments when privately speaking, do not conceal that all the programmes—mainly those of debt redemption, freeing of bonded labour, minimum wages—have been discontinued for all practical purposes . . . There has been no imposition of collective fine anywhere for atrocities on the rural poor. The plan to raise an armed Harijan militia has not progressed at all.

Arun Sinha revealed that "the acquisition of surplus land in the last two years was merely 5000 acres as compared to over 2.3 lakh acres in 1975-77 (emergency days)."[1] The reason : Janata is afraid of landlords. Sinha added : "The food-for-work programme has been largely bungled in the State. The investment of over Rs. 40 crores in this is believed to have been swindled by the officials and contractors," and social workers, therefore, have been completely defeated.

Soon after he became Finance Minister, Charan Singh who yields to none in his loyalty to Gandhi and therefore waxes eloquent in praise of primitivism taught by the Mahatma, presented a budget to Parliament in which larger share was reserved for rural upliftment. The gross provision in the total demands for grant from the Government of India was set as high as 36534 crores in 1978-79 whereas in 1960-61 it was only Rs. 7759 crores. It had been increased to Rs. 22003 in 1975-76 by the Congress Government. To secure the huge funds, Charan Singh left nothing untaxed. To heavily tax the luxury goods and even necessities of life in cities and towns was expected and defendable to a considerable extent. But to levy imposts on matches, *bidis*, soap and kerosene oil, the most essential needs of the rural poor, was out of tune with his political philosophy. Lenin when told that soap was selling in larger quantity is rural areas in USSR, ejaculated : "It shows revolution in progressing." But Charan Singh

[1] *The Indian Express*, May 26, 1979.

when questioned for taxing toilet soap advised people not to use it as "it is harmful to the oil in the skin. The people should make proper use of water to wash the dirt off."[1] In a land where Prime Minister Desai recommended drinking of one's own urine as panacea for all sickness of body and mind, Charan Singh's answer should astonish no one.

George Fernades, Union Minister for Industry, admitted on May 1, 1979, that "unless concrete steps to fulfil the aspirations of the people were initiated in the next few months it would be difficult to save the country from reaching pre-emergency chaos". Meaningfully, he added "he did not believe that Mrs. Indira Gandhi clamped the emergency solely to perpetuate the rule of her dynasty. The economy of the country had collapsed and she wanted to save her government from the situation."

Addressing a public meeting on June 7, 1979, at Srisailam in Kurnool district. N. Sanjiva Reddy, President of India, appealed to those at the helm of affairs and the rich in the country to help reduce the growing economic disparities. He warned that "India would face an unprecedented unpeaval if immediate steps are not taken to mitigate the sufferings of the poor."

Among the first progressive measures Janata Government took after assuming power was to liberate national Press of all the shackles that Indira Gandhi Government had forged for it. This was a very welcome step, universally applauded. But with passage of time it became doubtful whether it was done as a matter of principle or because the hands of Janata leaders had been forced by circumstances to do so. Considering the antecedents of Janata leaders only a naive person would say that Press freedom is an article of faith with them.

As long as the national Press helped the Janata Government to expose the atrocities of Indira Gandhi, her son and her caucus, it was praised for its independence but as soon as

[1] *A report by UNI News Agency* dated May 28, 1979.

it began to be critical of the doings of the Janata, its infighting, inefficiency, corruption, failures, and non-implementation of election pledges, the Janata leaders began to frown and throw out hints that Press freedom would be curtailed. Morarji Desai rebuked the Press for stating that there was crisis in the Party which was by this time known to every school boy. L.K. Advani, Minister for Information and Broadcasting, lamented that he did not see any constructive journalism in the country; Charan Singh, Finance Minister, protested that the Press did not assist him in upliftment of rural masses. Biju Patnaik, Minister for Steel, branded the Press as "the killer of Janata Party". He said : "You were controlled. We made you free and you are misutilising this freedom deliberately and persistently to kill the Janata Party." Pressures were brought to bear on correspondents and editors to fall in line with the official policy in matters of national importance.

In early June, the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act was extended to the printing industry by amending it. The amendment gave the Government sweeping powers to control every aspect of newspaper industry including production, pricing. distribution and management; the Government could virtually take over a newspaper if, and when, it so liked.

When the editors held a seminar in New Delhi in the end of April, 1979, the strained relations between the Press and the Janata Government were fully reflected. Said K.R. Sunder Rajan, a columnist of the *Hindustan Times* on May 4 : "Almost no one had a good word for Janata Press Policy. Some editors went to the extent of charging that ruling politicians at the Centre and in the states were pressurising the Press in the same way as the Congress regime."

In their election manifesto the Janata Party assured the people that if voted to power the Party will make the Radio and TV autonomous. To implement the assurance, as stated earlier, a committee was set up under the chairmanship of B.G. Verghese. In due course the Committee submited a comprehensive report making proposals as to how the autonomy

could be effected. The committee suggested that "the fundamental principles of autonomy and independence of the corporation should be clearly written into the Constitution. . . Once this is done, any law in derogation of the autonomy and independence of the corporation would be struck down by the courts as invalid."

After scrutinizing the report, the Government produced a bill entitled the Prasar Bharati Bill which substantially left out the essential recommendations of the Verghese Committee nullifying the concept of autonomy and continuing the grip of the Government on the medias. Broadcasting was to be the business of the I & B Ministry which would retain its name. Verghese Committee had conceded that the Government could issue directives to the corporation but these would be restricted to preservation of public order, to national security and other matters of grave public importance. The Prasar Bharati Bill provided that the corporation will be securely in the grasp of the Government. The Bill says : "the Central Government may, from time to time, issue to the corporation such directives as it may think necessary for the efficient administration of this Act". According to the Bill "The appointment of the chairman of the corporation is to be selected jointly by the President, Speaker of Lok Sabha and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha". It makes the autonomy of the corporation nominal. The Verghese Committee could hardly welcome the Prasar Bharati Bill. They had been let down by the Janata Government and they expressed their disappointment in a lengthy statement criticising the Bill. "Instead of the genuine automony for broad casting that the country was promised," bewailed the Verghese Committee, "the Prasar Bharati Bill offers something emasculated and confined with the executive continuing as the dominant influence." It was the opinion of the Committee that the Bill "seeks to give more power to the executive instead of granting real autonomy"[1]

The Verghese Committee has virtually suffered the same

[1] *The Indian Express*, May 24, 1979.

fate as Chanda Committee. According to the opinion of the All India Radio Programme Staff Association "the Bill would further increase Government control over AIR and TV."[1] Under caption "No Autonomy This", the *Indian Express* said editorially :

> The principle of automony, to which the Janta Party and it government were pledged has been all but abandoned... It is claimed that the Government's reserve powers are necess sary to correct aberrations in the working of Prasar Bharati.
>
> Can the Janata Government be so blissfully unaware that the public fears are justifiably all in the other directions—the misuse of powers by the political and bureaucratic authority ? It is as a check against this that autonomy was to have provided the answar."[2]

But it is neither the constitutional amendments nor the whitling down of Press freedom that concerns the average citizen. What bothers him most is economic distress, poverty, unemployment and deterioration in law and order.

We have already discussed the sky-rocketing prices of the essential commodities. Let us now have a look at law and order situation. Since the puritans became the rulers of India, knifing in buses, murders, kidnappings, pickpocketings, burglaries, communal riots, highway robberies, rapes, dacoities, rail and bus accidents have steadily grown in number. What is worse, the hooligans have been so much emboldened that a peaceful victim seldom dares to report to the police for fear of reprisals. Dacoities and robberies are not rare occurrences in the railways. The United News of India reported on June 17, that "a murder every hundred minutes and a dacoity every 90 minutes was reported in 1978 in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in the country . . . The state witnessed 33 riots and 22 robberies daily for the same year." In the first half of the year 1979, Bombay witnessed one murder every alternate day.[3]

The *Hindustan Times*, held a survey through its accredi-

[1] *Ibid.*, May 21, 1979.
[2] *Ibid.*, May 18, 1979.
[3] *Ibid.*, Sep. 2, 1979.

ted correspondents throughout the country in early May, 1979, and the reports showed that lawlessness was on the increase. In every state crime of almost every description had shown an upward trend. A Police Commission member held that lessening of police chiefs' authority and links of station officers with politicians was responsible for "a galloping increase in crime in U.P." His assessment was that over the years police have ceased to be a a disciplined organisation.

Surprisingly the metropolitan city of Delhi fared the worst. Neither day nor night prevented miscreants from making their forays. When it was brought to the notice of the Prime Minister Desai that life had become insecure in the capital and cinema goers were harassed and even their lives endangered when they returned home after witnessing late shows in picture halls, amazingly he suggested that "cinema houses in Delhi should close an hour earlier than they do now in view of deterioration in law and order situation." He might as well have advised people not to leave homes any time to have safety.

Deterioration in law and order situation assumed serious proportions in view of the discontent in police force in majority of the states which surfaced in May, 1979, when copts abandoning their posts held demonstrations seeking redress of their grievances. The state ministries panicked and either with unseemly haste accepted the demands or gave prompt assurances to fulfil them. The Union Home Minister called a meeting of state chief ministers to consider the issue when it came to be known that a number of genuine grievances existed which though repeatedly brought to the notice of the government, were carelessly ignored giving rise to the mutinous attitude of policemen. What is of particular indignation to peace-loving citizenry is that the common complaint of the guardians of law and order was the interference of politicians in official work. No police force in any democratic country can be expected to function efficiently if ruling party members want it to do their bidding, however unfair or unlawful.

The revolt of policemen in several states was partly quelled by granting a number of rights and overdue facilities contemptuously ignored for years.

Union Home Minister, H.M. Patel, warned on May 13, that "the progress of the country would be at stake if acts of indiscipline and violence now being witnessed would continue." Addressing the annual general meeting of the Bharat Chamber of Commerce, Patel said : "No country could progress in a situation where law and order remained a problem, where sectional, communal and parochial interests overshadowed social goals and where the ordinary business of life was continually threatened with disruption by powerful and organized groups." The sermon was given too late and ungraciously considering the fact that most of the grievances of the constabulary were found correct but carelessly swept under the carpet in Janata rule.

As stated early the gloss of the puritans' liberalism had worn thin not long after their assuming power. They had recommended adoption of Preventive Detention acts to the state governments which some of them had more than welcomed and readily put on the statute book in stringent form. On August 27, 1977, Mohan Dharia, Commerce Minister, advised the Janata Government to consider "whether or not we should take to recourse to some measure like MISA and DIR against antisocial elements." A little later in October Shanti Bhushan, Law Minister, said the Government was considering some measures for detaining anti-social elements.

Both Prime Minister Desai and Home Minister Charan Singh signed the papers to revive the lawless law which came to be known as Mini MISA for providing deterrant power to the authorities. But there was a public uproar and the puritans had to drop the measure. Nevertheless, the episode exposed the anti-democratic counter revolutionary character of the Janata rule and the puritan philosophy.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Blossoming of Ram Rajya (ii)

Discovering to her own and Free India's bewilderment that hundreds of thousands in this country were held as bonded labourers who eked out their existence as slaves, Indira Gandhi made the Emergency regime enact the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976. It did not produce speedy and satisfactory results. The slavery continued despite the promulgation of the law until Mrs. Gandhi was in power. The system was an ugly blot on the name of Swatantra Bharat (Free India). Those who called 1977 elections as a new revolution and second freedom of the country, should have ensured speedy liberation of bonded labourers and ended the disgraceful system within reasonable time. If it was really a revolution which the country had witnessed in 1977 this could have been effected if the will was there, and nobody would have dared to oppose it. But class conscious and caste-ridden puritans would be last persons to do so.

Bonded labourers were as a matter of fact soon forgotten after assumption of power by the Janata. Nearly two years later the government was reminded of the luckless lakhs. A letter was addressed to the state governments asking them for reports on the progress made in relieving the condition of the labourers. Surprisingly, the Janata Government thought the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act was an appropriate legislation and no more was needed to be done in this connection. It was left to a junior minister to look into the problem.

The Union Minister of State for Labour, Larang Sal, asked the state governments "to have an objective assessment

of the extant prevalence of bonded labour system."[1] That has been the positive contribution which Janata Government made to annihilate the system!

Obviously the Government expected that it will take years to end the slavery under Ram Rajya. It was the measure of the revolution which leaders of Janata Party claimed as having been introduced while they were in the saddle.

With the puritans at the helm of affairs, orthodox Hindus felt encouraged to take up all the undecided issues adversely affecting non-Hindus, get them solved as they had willed in pro-and post-independence eras but could not have their way due to impartiality of the British before 1947 and half-heartedness of revisionist rulers after independence.

Imposition of Hindi as the official language and lingua franca came first. Nehru had warned against forcing the language on non-Hindi states though the Constitution had recognised it as the national language. He had adopted a policy that Hindi will be made lingua franca in all parts of the country only when non-Hindi states voluntarily accepted it. With Hindi enthusiasts in power the Hindi movement was vigorously revived with the ultimate aim of forcing the language on all states. To start with, under the Janata it was surreptitiously introduced replacing English in public sector undertakings, in Post and Telegraph and Railway departments, in Defence Services and other central government offices.

The *English Hatao* Committee became very active and took lively interest in the crusade. Of course, these moves had the official blessing, patronage and sanction. The Hindi Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Health expressed anxiety that the pace of introduction of Hindi as the medium of instruction in medical colleges should be quickened; some members wanted all drug labels to be in Hindi and doctor's prescriptions also written in Hindi transliterating the English or Latin names of medicines.

[1] *The Statesman*, January 21, 1979.

No arguments were sound enough in puritan view that it would cause utter confusion and endanger lives of patients. Sensibly, doctors refused to oblige.

The resistance in South India to such provocative proposals grew equally strident. The Rajaji Centenary Convention demanded the Union Government to retrace its steps on the official language issue and continue English indefinitely as associate official language.[1]

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.G.R. Ramchandran, said that his government will not accept Hindi as the only official language. He warned the Central Government not to impose Hindi and thus precipitate the matter which, he cautioned, might endanger the unity of the country. The DMK held an anti-Hindi conference on December 25, 1978, and threatened to start an agitation against imposition of Hindi. Atal Behari Vajpayee, External Affairs Minister, "was denounced for delivering his speech in Hindi at the United Nations." M. Karunanidhi who presided over the conference said : "This sort of fanaticism has to be condemned."[2] A number of MPs including K. Gopala (Congress), Rano Shaiza (Janata), Mrs. Margret Alva (Congress I) P. Ramamurti (CPM), Govindan Nair (CPI), A. Balapajnoor (ADMK), Morashi Maren (DMK), Hoping Stone Lyndoh (unattached), Dinesh Goswami, Mohd. Shafi Qureshi and P.A. Sangma (all Congress), took the intitiative to call an all parties conference to discuss the insidious attempts by the Centre to impose Hindi on the non-Hindi speaking people.

Commenting editorially on the controversy, on May 5, 1979, under caption "Not a Healthy Sign", the *Statesman*, New Delhi, observed :

> Medical text books and reference material as well as most relevant and reliable works on law, history, geography, administration, political science and international affairs are still available only in English. What is more important, the basic principles that inspire these disciplines are part of an English educational heritage that has not been fully

[1] *The Indian Express*, December 5, 1978.
[2] *Ibid.*, December 16, 1978.

absorbed by any of the Indian languages. Nor can it be claimed any longer that English is alien to India. If the Janata leaders are unwilling to take into account these rational considerations, self-interest should warn them not to overlook the political response to Hindi supremacy. New Delhi's encouragement of the Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha had already provoked most Southern States to erode the three language formula in favour of English and the mother tongue in schools, colleges and administration[1]

Equally important in the eyes of Hindi chauvinists and puritans is the problem of cow slaughter referred to earlier. Imposing a ban on slaughter of milch cattle is included in Indian Constitution as a Directive Principle for Guidance of States. Non-Hindus resent total imposition ; so do some sections of Hindus who by tradition are not debarred from eating beef or flesh of buffalos. The case was taken to the Supreme Court which in a famous judgement upheld the ban but only on milch cows. However, orthodox Hindus supported by puritans insisted on total ban on slaughter of cows whether milch, barren or old, decript or useless; it was religious fanaticism at its ugliest. Even in the earlier period of Ram Rajya most of the states had passed laws banning slaughter of cattle. But two non-Congress states refused to fall in line. Had the slaughter been confined to milch cattle as the constitutional provision was interpreted by the Supreme Court in its judgement, it would not be objected to and would in all probability be supported by substantial non-Hindu opinion. But when insistence was laid on the banning of slaughter of each and every cow, minority communities justifiably considered it to be an infliction—uneconomical, irrational and unjust. No fewer than 250 million people that is about 40 per cent of the entire Indian population are allowed by their religions to eat beef ; there is, therefore, neither sense nor morality in demanding total ban on cow shaughter merely because the majority community demands it on no other ground than religious emotion and sentimental bias.

According to figures supplied by N.S. Ramaswamy of the Indian Institute of Management, "India has today about

[1] *The Indian Express* May 10, 1979.

72 million bullocks, 56 million cows and 4 million young calves. The cows become useless six years ahead of their life span. About five million cows are barren. Another five million have finished lactation. At any time about one crore cows will no longer yield milk; their maintenance may cost more than Rs. 300 croes annually; they cannot live on air. They will therefore either be starved to death or become an unbearable burden on those peasants and others who have little food for themselves to survive."

As early as 1967 groups of Hindu zealots launched an agitation demanding the abolition of cow slaughter. The Shankaracharya of Puri led it. He restored to fast unto death, the weapon populalised by Gandhi to coerce opponents. A large number of sadhus were recruited for anti-government demonstrations. With *trishuls* (iron tridents) in their hands these parasites of Hindu society marched through the Parliament Street in New Delhi, became violent and restored to incendiarism, lawlessness and destruction of property. But the government of the revisionists remained stiff and would not yield. The agitation fizzled out and the Sankaracharya ate the humble pie.

It was under pressure of orthodox Hindus that by 1979 a total ban on cow slaughter was imposed in one state after another; West Bengal and Kerala were the two exceptions which held steadfast and refused to succumb.

As usual the Hindus tried to present the religious issue as a part of Indian culture and in disregard of Non-Hindu opinion made the Janata Government to act which, of course, needed little persuasion to yield.

Vinoba Bhave, boosted by Gandhi himself as a man of high culture, used the morally dubious weapon of satyagraha in the last week of May, 1979, to get the ban imposed all over the country. He utilized the tactics of fasting unto death to coerce the progressive non-Janata government of West Bengal and Kerala to carry out his bidding. Blind traditionalists, bigots and fanatics rose in support of Bhave. The Shakaracharyas of all the four maths whom mutual rivalry and jealousy keeps apart, met after 125 years in a conclave and

lent their vigour support to Bhave. All arguments failed to wean away the recalcitrant recluse of Paunar Ashram from the mad course. It was pure and downright blackmail that the monk sought. But instead of letting him commit suicide as should have been done to straighten Indian political life and rid it of the canker of satyagraha once and for all, the puritan rulers seriously met to find a way out. West Bengal and Kerala having stubbornly refused to oblige the petty-minded ascetic, it was decided that an amendment to the constitution should be introduced in Lok Sabha to enable the Union Government to take the subject of cow slaughter on Concurrent list and, thereafter, by a suitable legislation impose the ban on the entire country including the two unyielding states. On this assurance Vinoba Bhave broke his five-day fast on April 26, 1979.

The controversial Constitutional (Fiftieth Amendment) Bill on Cow Protection was introduced in the Lok Sabha on May 18, 1979, despite stiff opposition by CPI, CPM, AIDMK, and some independent members. Among the opposition Congress (I) remained neutral not to antagonise the saint whom Indira Gandhi adores. It was reported that most members of the Sabha were against the Bill. But party discipline prevented Janata members from voting against it. Marxist MP Ramamurti revealed that the bill would be rejected in Parliament if members were given freedom to vote[1].

To exploit ignorant people in the name of religion and ancient culture became a most lucrative, popular profession of imposters, maniacs, cheats and such other bad characters. In post-independence period there has been a mushroom growth of godmen, yogis, swamis, babas, matajis and others; not only their number increased but also their following mounted by leaps and bounds under Janata rule. The reason for this was that the puritans believed that any man or woman claiming to perform miracles and "spiritual" exercises including yogic asans (postures) were reviving the vanishing ancient

[1] *The Indian Express*, May 10, 1979.

Hindu culture ; they were therefore entitled to high esteem and need to be encourged to carry on their fraudulent trade. Almost all leaders sat at the feet of one or the other godman.

The sacred tirthas where the wandering sadhus assemble got a new sanctity ; holding of holy *yagnas* (religious sacrifices) became common and huge amounts of eatables were burnt in them. One of the biggest "yagna" on which 3 crores of rupees were spent was held in Jhabua in Western Madhya Pradesh. When 30 crores of Indians do not have bellyful to eat, when millions suffered and thouands died due to flood and draught, a local godman crossed all barriers of wasteful expenditure, burnt a hundred quintals of ghee costing Rs. 20 lakhs, 650 quintals of foodgrains worth more than a lakh of rupees as offering to deities. The yagna was performed to bring peace and happiness to mankind in Kaliyuga (Dark Age). To the famishing it was a circus to forget woes, to others it was a diversion from humdrum life and big crowds attended to witness it. The *Indian Express* correspondent reported:

> The State Public Works Department specially constructed a 10 km road from the Meghanagar Railway Station to the yagna site. The Western Railway made elaborate arrangement for water and shade for the visitors at the Meghanagar station in M.P. and Dohad station in Gujarat. The State Transport Corporation ran special bus service to clear the rush at Meghanagar. Banks too did their bit. The State Bank of Indore and the State Bank of India opened temporary branches at the site.[1]

This was the third such yagna conducted by the 78-year old Mahant Jamnadas. There are such mahants, big and small, conducting yagnas all over the country utterly unconcerned to what happens to the hungry Indian humanity.

One of the powerful vehicles of education is AIR and TV. But they can be useful if they are free to be critical not only of the political parties and social bodies but also of the outmoded systems, pernicious doctrines, central and state

[1] *The Indian Express*, May 10, 1979.

governments. The two medias should stop admiring godmen and provide healthy intellectual food to the people. They can indeed bring about the long awaited and direly needed revolution in thinking and behaviour of the nation if they are directed in a proper manner.

If they have failed in this mission the reason should be sought in their being tied to apron strings of the backward-looking governments. When this defect was dimly perceived be some Congress leaders the government set up, in 1964, the Chanda Committee to review the work of both the units under the I & B Ministry. The committee submitted its findings in 1966 but smelling danger to its vested interest by acting on the recommendation of the committee the report was ignored and allowed to gather dust in the ministry's shelves.

Since independence Ram Rajya has never had its field day as under Janata rule. Traditionally, puritans hold women in contempt like the ancient lawgivers which is hardly surprising since national politicians seek inspiration from Brahmin scriptures especially from the ideals of *Ramcharitmanas* popularized by Gandhi. As in other matters Hindu sages and savants have hypocritically paid tributes to the greatness of women but in practice the fair sex is discriminated against at every step. When Morarji Desai became Prime Minister he publicly made uncomplementary remarks about the capacity of women to rule or manage public affairs which provoked angry retorts and reproofs from self-respecting women in India and abroad. Afraid of losing popularity by candidly expressing his true views he subsequently resorted to subterfuge. Inaugurating a three day conference on "women and development" organized on May 19-21, 1979, by the ministry of education and social welfare, the Prime Minister paid tributes to women as "having greater strength of mind and greater courage." A staff reporter of the *Times of India* wrote : "The Prime Minister today donned the mantle of a liber and said that phrases like "weaker sex" coined by men to establish their supremacy over women be banned." Though Morarji boasted that in ancient times

women enjoyed a special status in the family but he felt sad "in that modern times they were not tied up in the household which causes disintegration of family." The sting was in the tail of his observations.

However, Desai's praises of women, honest or hypocritical, deceived no one. The conference expressed "disappointment and indignation" at the failure of the constitutional and legal guarantees to bring about positive changes in the position of women. The conference complained that women's participation in politics had declined in post-independence period. The delegates noted that the percentage of women elected to the legislative bodies had gone down and political parties had been showing a tendency for nominating fewer women candidates on party ticket.

By tradition and habit born of the teachings of shastras like *Manusmriti* and holy books like *Ramcharitmanas*, Indians take a woman as inferior being, lust object, dish washer, baby maker and no better than domestic drudge. She can never have nor aspire to have equality with men. In more than 95 per cent of the feature films women are shown like that and made to take pride in being depicted as such. This is considered to be very natural in Hindu society ; there are no protests from women or even from those men who consider themselves to be emancipated intellectuals. In fact, when women are bullied in a picture and she cringes, crawls and worships her brutal husband it is considered nothing out of the ordinary. Frequently picture halls reverberate with joyous cries when an unfortunate woman wins through sheer submissiveness, humility, inexhaustible patience, forgiveness and forbearance.

The same is the case with text books taught in schools most of which are produced by two national agencies patronized by the Government, namely, National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). After content-analysis of 41 text books read by more than 13 lakh students in classes nine to eleven, Narendra Nath Kalia of State University College, Buffalo (New York), observed early in 1979 : "I have found that Indian text books portray women as submissive

incompetent, weak, and foolish creatures. Men on the other hand, are portrayed as independent, dominant and generally superior to women." This is what *Ramcharitmanas* has repeatedly stated and emphasised about the two sexes.

Kalia found that "in 47 biographies of women, over 100 female characters appear as sex role victims. Men routinely abuse and violently beat women in many and retain their absolute dominance. Fathers bemoan the birth of a daughter, while praising their sons. A married woman is expected to grovel before her husband while he lives and follow him to pyre when he dies. Even today the text books idolize 'suttee' and Jauhar."[1]

One pernicious evil springing from the low status alloted to women in Hindu scriptures is dowry without which even cultured, educated, handsome, earning and healthy girls cannot find a suitable match.

Innumerable families have come to grief by incurring heavy debts to fulfil the requirements of dowry, particularly when not one but a number of daughters have to be married.

Newly wedded girls who failed to bring dowry to satisfy the greed of their in-laws has been cruelly murdered and the number of such victims has been increasing as also the cases of suicides committed by those who could not stand the taunts and gibes, cruelties and callousness of mother in-laws and other relations of husband.

An untiring social worker, Mrs. Subhadra Butalia, depending on official sources for her information, revealed that no fewer than 350 married girls were burned to death in Delhi alone in 1975. Hardly any year passes by when reports of such murders mostly by sprinkling kerosene oil over the clothes to ignite them and horribly end innocent lives, do not appear in the Press. Not able to stand ill treatment at in-laws many girls commit suicide as the only remedy when their parents, under influence of ancient Hindu culture, insist on harassed girls to be tolerant of abuses and atrocities inflicted by husbands and their relations.

[1] *The Indian Express* January 6, 1979.

The Prohibition of Dowry Act was adopted by the Parliament in Jawaharlal Nehru's lifetime in 1961. It banned giving or taking of dowry. But like so many other laws it proved completely ineffective and the system of selling bride-grooms to the highest bidder continues to flourish. Laws pale into insignificance before the holy traditions set down by *Ramcharitmanas*, the spiritual food of the Hindus.

In 1979 when Ram Rajya blossomed under the Janata government, wife-burning cases rapidly rose in number; it assumed the shape of an epidemic.

Proposals were therefore made to amend the Prohibition of Dowry Act to make it more comprehensive as well as more effective. State governments were instructed to take stringent measures to check harassment on account of dowry.

But the pernicious problem is a child of archaic culture and hardly manageable by law. As long as Hindus cherish belief in ancient traditions as the national leaders vigorously advise them to do, however strindgent a law to deal with the evil, giving and accepting of dowry will continue in one form or another because, it is considered a sacred duty of girl's parents to offer it. Did not Parvati's father give fabulous presents to Shivji at their marriage to fulfil his obligation ; did not King Janak give precious and plentiful dowry to Darshratha at the wedding of Sita with Lord Rama ? The custom has been elaborately dealt with by Tulsidas in *Ramcharitmanas*, the most popular holy poem sung in Hindu homes.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Infighting, Corruption and Inefficiency

Hinduism is neither a cohesive social system nor an integrating philosophy; it is divisive in character. From the rigid *chaturvarnya* (four-tier caste system) into which the society was divided in Vedic times to the countless subcastes which have emanated from it through the past ages, Indian people have been anything but socially united. A never-ending struggle has been going on among castes and subcastes which look towards each other with suspicion. This is so in every sector or social life. The country has for this reason heavily suffered throughout its history and the people have little benefited by experience. If anything, the divisive philosophy with its concomitants has been elevated to the plane of spiritualism and adored as the precious heritage of the Indian nation.

Indian politics in the past did not remain uninfluenced by the caste philosophy excepting to some extent under the Buddhists. But no sooner did neo-Brahminism raise its vicious head under the Guptas in fourth and fifth centuries than the rifts reappeared in a more virulent form. Even the enlightened British rule though it suppressed a number of social evils failed to make a serious dent in the rigidity of caste system.

When by the last quarter of the nineteenth century political bodies came into being, almost from the outset their leaders were involved in factional fight produced by the mentality born of caste order. Try how hard they would, not even the tallest among the leaders could succeed in ending the infights. Mahatma Gandhi, was no doubt a reformer

but did not advocate of abolition caste. To avoid facing the reality it was falsely believed that with achievement of independence and disappearance of foreign rule the disruptive tendencies will automatically wither away under the impact of forces of rising nationalism.

Unfortunately, that development devoutly wished has not taken place. Political parties with different ideologies under a democratic system are natural and necessary. But it is one thing to have parties belonging to various schools of politics and quite another to have a party heavily influenced in its functioning by caste distinctions, with no discipline and with leaders constantly at logger heads with each other. In such conditions merit is deprived of its deserved place and is compelled to take a back seat.

Being a party composed of five constituent groups, Janata was especially prone to infighting. It was not for some outstanding qualification of Morarji Desai which entitled him to be the Prime Minister; he did not command that towering position or respect of the Janata members in the Parliament which makes one to be the head of government. It was a tactics on the part of Kripalani and Jayaprakash Narayan to choose Desai the leader of the Janata Parliamentary group in order to impress the world and assure the Indian people that those voted to power were united, patriotic and selfless. But the forced choice rankled in many hearts and it was reflected in the behaviour of those who felt disgruntled.

Almost from the day Janata took oath of office infighting started. True, in the first few months it went on undetected but with passage of time it surfaced and grew fiercer day by day. In early 1978, Charan Singh, Home Minister, and Morarji Desai, Prime Minister, accused each other, of their family members indulging in corruption which lowered the prestige of both in the public eye.

The infighting took the first serious turn when in April, 1978, Charan Singh addressed letters to Morarji Desai, severely criticising government policies and the character of some of the cabinet colleagues. In his letter of April 2, Charan Singh

indirectly charged H.N. Bahuguna, Minister for Chemicals and Petroleum, with corruption and of being an agent of the notorious Russian secret service, K.G.B. Refuting the charges as unsubstantiated invectives, Bahuguna in his letter of July 10, to the address of Prime Minister, said that to some Charan Singh was "in narcissus-like love with himself" and he was "mentally deranged".

Bahuguna pleaded with Morarji Desai : "Should the Home Minister of a country be allowed to misuse his position to play or to encourage the game of character assassination ? I seek your guidance as to how can one feel safe with such a person as highly placed as Chaudhary Singh (Charan Singh)." Incredibly, only sixteen months later Bahuguna actively assisted a rebellion against Morarji bringing about his downfall and accepting Charan Singh as Prime Minister of a new government. On his part Charan Singh obligingly nominated Bahuguna as Finance Minister of his cabinet.

On April 8, 1978, Charan Singh in a statement called Desai's Cabinet "a pack of impotents". This left no alternative to Desai but to advise Charan Singh to resign from the Government for openly levelling sweeping and irresponsible charges against his Cabinet colleagues.

Charan Singh resigned on June 30. But a few months later under pressure of important Janata leaders including some ministers, the Prime Minister had to take him back in a more exalted position as the senior Deputy Prime Minister with Finance in his charge. Jagjivan Ram was promoted as junior Deputy Prime Minister.

The infighting, however, did not cease and indeed became more sinister and destructive. Some senior ministers lost all sense of joint responsibility and came out contradicting each other on important matters, publicly discussing their differences and criticising their own government for its faults of omission and commission. The process culminated in July, 1979, when the moonsoon session of the Lok Sabha started and a resolution of no-confidence in the Desai Government was moved by Y.B. Chavan, the leader of the Congress Party, Raj Narain, former Health Minister, who had also

been thrown out of Government for acts of indiscipline along with his patron, Charan Singh, but refused to be retaken into the cabinet by the Prime Minister, raised the banner of rebellion. He resigned from the Janata Party and was able to persuade 47 MPs of the Party to do likewise. He extended his support to Chavan's no-confidence resolution against the Government. The gravemen of his charge was that the Government was dominated by Jan Sangh (RSS) which was a Hindu communal organisation opposed to secularism. Raj Narain and his supporters formed a new Janata Party (S) laying stress on secularism which they claimed distinguished them from the parent body.

The fierce infighting throughout the two years of its rule left Janata Party little time to plan for the welfare of the nation. Being engrossed with squabbles of all sorts the ministers threw pressing problems intimately concerned with the life of the people especially the lower, downtrodden and impoverished classes, under the carpet. But it only multiplied them in number and caused increasing disaffection and discontent. Morarji Desai was in the habit of dogmatically giving definite dates by which the problems would be solved : five years for abolition of untouchability, ten years for disappearance of unemployment, two years for ending of corruption etc.

National problems do not find solution according to the wishes of any person however great; as a matter of fact, if unattended to for long and left to themselves they have a knack of becoming acuter and recalcitrant. Though some of the problems were centuries-old and many had been inherited by the Janata Government from its predecessors, the incompetence; mutual recriminations, inexperience and complacency of the Janata rulers gave them greater dimensions and viciousness. Thus deterioration set in allround and in every walk of life. The backward sections suffered more heavily than before; the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were harassed and trodden over more frequently; the minorities felt more insecure and unsafe than they did under the Congress rule; law and order existed only in name; corruption

assumed uuprecedented heights in official as well as in non-official life.

Kuldip Nayar writing in *the Indian Express* in July 1979 said :

> Corruption, nepotism, inefficiency attained new heights. Many ministers in thc centre and the states were publicly accused and some charged for indulging in speculation either directly or through their kith and kin. The nearest relations, sons, nephews, son-in-laws of such outstanding central leaders like Prime Minister Morarji Desai, Senior Deputy Prime Minister Charan Singh and Junior Deputy Prime Minister Jagjivan Ram were involved in it. Desai and Charan Singh accused each other, in their correspondence, of corruption. But Desai refused to institute an enquiry into the case of his son, Kanti. When Rajya Sabha took up the case and adopted in August, 1978, a resolution in this behalf the Government was forced to have a retired judge of the Supreme Court, Mr. C. A. Vaidialingam go through Rajya Sabha debate on the corruption charges and say whether any prima facie case exists in respect of charges which pertain to the period after the Janata government came to power in March 1977.

Unmindful of the miseries of the common people, Parliamentarians at the Centre and legislators in the states consider it their due to enrich themselves by all means. In November 1978 a non-official Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by a Janata member, P.Sinha, seeking to raise the monthly salary and daily allowance of MPs from Rs. 500 to for Rs. 1000 and from Rs. 51 to Rs. 75 respectively ; the rulers voted perks after perks for themselves in the shape of allowances, TAs, nominal rents for government houses, trips abroad, free air and rail tickets etc. As early as 1961 the then auditor general had pointed out in his report that a central minister costs the state exchequer more than a member of the viceroy's executive council did inpre-independence days. In 1971 Mr. Dandekar, Swatantra Party M.P., startled the nation with the disclosure in the Parliament that a Cabinet Minister's salary as compiled by him was Rs. 4,48,000 per annum.

The Parliamentarians have under Janata regime continued not only to raise their emoluments but also granted to themselves pensions (in certain cases life pensions) for having

functioned for a few days or a full term as members of Parliament ; they have sought houses to live in after retirement from political life in a special colony to be built for them. Without going into the details of these perks it will suffice to say that parliamentarians and legislators have never been as rich as they are today, while more and more luckless people are going below the poverty line. What a fine example of Ram Rajya in action !

With neither sufficient intelligence nor experience of the functioning of administration most of the Janata rulers have proved amazingly irresponsible, inefficient and unfit for the jobs which have been entrusted to them.

Repeatedly Morarji Desai, the self-righteous Prime Minister, was made to eat his own words, tender apologies and ask for pardon of Parliament and people for the blunders he committed. Some people have called it his humility but it is difficult to forget that he had been, off and on, a mintster in the Bombay state as well as in the central government for nearly forty years. Such long and varied experience notwithstanding he often created problems by his avoidable fatuous statements. He annoyed people in Sikkim and Pondichery by his dogmatic utterances. He declared it was wrong to convert the former into an associate state and the latter a separate state. He knew the matters had been finally settled whether one liked it or not. He was taken to task for the statements and had to withdraw them. In Goa a civil disobedence movement was started by his own partymen for his arbitrary action defying a well established convention in forming the local government.

Statements issued by ministers and subsequently contradicted by their colleagues was no rare occurrence under Janata rule. On occasions two ministers spoke against each other on the same platform. For a minister to indict his own government in a public meeting had ceased to be a surprise. While an agitation by railwaymen was being carried on against the Government for not granting them the bonus and the Government was undecided about it. George Fernandes, Minister for Industry, addressing the agitators, said to the

consternation of his colleagues, that he had supported the demand in the cabinet and would join the agitation if the bonus was not paid, It was widely known that there was in practice no unity of purpose, no perceptible goal, no well defined principles and no hard and fast rules to guide the members of the Union Cabinet. They cherished prejudices, dogmas and likes and dislikes; most of them were egged on by fads which they believed to be matters of life and death. No one seemed to be least aware of the joint cabinet responsibility. Charan Singh's remark that his colleagues were "a bunch of impotents" however objectionable to have been publicly made by a minister, was not very far from the truth.

Morarji Desai was ruled by the supreme desire of making his countrymen "moral" and he rigidly believed in antediluvian morality entirely unsuited to modern age. His conception of morality was particularly concentrated in imposing total prohibition. He was not particularly worried about many frightening and pressing problems that eat into the vitals of Indian society but was deadset to make prohibition a success. Competent sociologists have cogently argued that instead of improving morals total prohibition is going to intensify immorality of all classes. But Desai treated such sane views with utter disdain. Charan Singh believed that the key to India's economic liberty lies in enrichment of kulaks. Though his proposals have put the country's economy out of gear, he was unyielding in his fad. George Fernandes who knows next to nothing about the process and development of industrialization felt mentally tormented by the successuful running of capitalist concerns and would like to demolish them. In disregard of the unpunctuality of railway trains, Madhu Dandwate thought that introduction of a greater number of fast trains was the remedy to set the mismanaged railway system in order. Jagjivan Ram was engrossed with his next opportunist move when the Janata arrived at the brink of a precipice about to fall. Mohan Dharia unable to curb black marketing in essential needs of life and unsuccessful in dealing with shortages contemplated an ambitious project to establish a distribution network on a

national level. H.M. Patel was more concerned about special courts to try Indira Gandhi and her cronies than with rapid rise in crime and widespread disorder in the country.

Janata government was composed of mediocre nincompoops and not of intelligent patriots who claimed to fulfil the mission of establishing peace or building democracy ; the idea of bringing about a social revolution in the antique Indian society did not even cross their mind.

The indifference of Janata parliamentarians including ministers, was witnessed on May 17, 1979, when the government suffered embarrassment of seeing a constitutional amendment bill piloted by the Home Minister in the Lok Sabha being refused permission at the introduction stage because Janata Party whip could not muster quorum. The bill was to confer statutory status on the Minorities Commission and the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It evidenced negligence, carelessness and ineffiiciency of the government. Prime Minister Desai had to apologize.

An instance of historic significance of inefficiency was set by the Janata Prime Minister Desai when on the basis of an unreliable report he hastily came to the Lok Sabha on March 22, 1979, and announced that the ailing Jayaprakash Narayan was dead. He got a condolence resolution passed by Indian Parliament and took other steps in this behalf only to learn to his horror a few hours later that his information was incorrect. Meanwhile, the breath-taking report had been broadcast by AIR and TV. Desai got the Lok Sabha reassembled in a hurry in the afternoon to offer unqualified apologies for his unparalleled blunder. It was the most grotesque mistake made by a Prime Minister. Was it because he was not on good terms with the superboss of Janata Party whose interference however mild and cautious, in State affairs often irked the Prime Minister and in haste Morarji Desai did not feel the need to get the report verified, or was it the outcome of his staggering inefficiency?

Jayaprakash Narayan was, however, hovering between life and death and passed away six and half months later on October 9. There was State mourning for six days all over

the country. Schools and offices were closed for one day and tens of thousands joined the funeral procession in Patna. His body was cremated on the bank of holy Ganga with full State honours when the military reversed arms and fired guns in salutation.

But the common man remained unconcerned. "It was just like any other holiday" observed the *Hindustan Times* correspondent, "for most people in the city. Life went on as usual. Business was brisk as ever. Shops remained open. Cinemas were showing house full."

The national press paid glowing tributes to the prominent part JP took in the freedom struggle and the splendid service he rendered in the cause of nation-building. But it was generally held that he had failed in his endeavours to build united democratic India. In an article assessing his achievements his best friend and admirer, S. Mulgaokar, Editor in Chief of the *Indian Express*, remarked that "JP died a sad, unfulfilled man".[1]

Like Gandhi, Jayaprakash was a disillusioned person who saw his plans in a shambles. He entertained death wish at the dismal failure. The *Express News Service* reported after meeting his closest associates and attendants during the last days of his life :

> In the last days Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan experienced fits of depression, sometimes more than once in a day, that made him wish for deliverance.
> To him death had become a 'consummation to be devoutly wished' according to those who had observed him closely. The desire to shake off his mortal coils seemed to be growing at his vitals.[2]

It is inconceivable to hear the responsible head of Government dolling out such promises that untouchability can be destroyed within five years and that corruption will end in two years and unemployment vanish in ten years without having the least chance of such pledges being fulfilled in any

[1] *The Indian Express*, October 10, 1979.
[2] *Ibid.*, October 11, 1979.

forceeable future. Yet it was more than once after he become the Prime Minister that Desai made such bombastic statements. This only shows what a low estimation Desai has of the common sense of Indians including the educated, the intelligentsia and the intellectuals.

The bungling and inefficiency of the Janata leadership was quite evident in branches of administration mostly concerned with common people. A separate volume would be needed to narrate the stories, some amusing, others agonising, even if they are produced as examples. I have already discussed the law and order problem which led to prevalence of hooliganism and the frequent occurrence of criminal activities like murders, dacoities, rapes, kidnappings, burglaries, thefts, chain-snatchings, lootings, highway robberies, etc. Innumerable preventable strikes in industries, trade centres, offices were resorted to by employees merely because they felt convinced that the situations could not be brought under control due to incompetence, mismanagement and negligence of the govern ment, be it state or central, and the administration run by it.

The anti-Indian elements in North Eastern States especially Nagaland and Mizoram which had calmed down before Janata assumed power restarted depradations. In Mizoram the government was taken by surprise and could not handle the situation until forced to act in desperation. After much blood had been shed in the state in June, 1979, and all non-Mizos threatened to leave the State or face extinction, the government took action under the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The underground Mizo National Front (MNF) together with Mizo National Army (MNA) were banned and the well-known Mizo leader, Laldenga, arrested from a house at Gulmuhar Park in New Delhi. It is doubtful if these steps could prove of any avail in bringing Mizos in the mainstream of National life; it only made the reconciliation more difficult.

The standard of work in public services plummeted causing grave concern to all sections of society. There appeared to be no remedy to set it right. The trust and confidence which people had in the working of certain important

departments such as Posts and Telegraphs was lost. Letters posted were delivered after a week or even ten days with destination of less than 500 miles. It was scandalous to know that telegrams—express or ordinary—charged and paid for were delivered by post and no refunds for the payment made. It caused besides loss in bussiness a great deal of vaxation to the people. On June 19, Indian Chamber of Commerce expressed its concern at the rapid deterioration in the Postal and Telegraph Services in regard to delivery of postal articles and telegraphic messages. The Chamber underlined the vital importance of an efficient and prompt service as without a proper, reliable and rapid communication system business activity could not expand. But the strong complaint and protest proved of no avail.

A similar deterioration, as already stated, was in evidence in the working of the Railways under the Janata due entirely to inefficiency. Besides frequent lootings of passengers by dacoits and killing of those who resisted, the trains were mostly unpunctual causing great inconvenience to the public. UNI reported on June 17, that the Prime Minister had personally expressed concern to the Railway Minister, Madu Dandavate, on more than one occasion over the deterioration in the operational efficiency of the railways and given him a free hand to deal firmly with the problem of staff indiscipline. But no change for the better could be effected.

A few days earlier on June 12, addressing general managers of zonal railways in New Delhi, Minister Dandavate exhorted them to take steps to correct "distortions" in the railway system. He virtually issued an indictment of railway operation. He admitted that the railways had been unable to provide enough wagons for moving coal out of the Karanpur and Raniganj mine areas. He also referred to the "deterioration in punctuality of trains". Commented *Express News Service* :

> After two years of trumpeting the achievements of the railways, the Railway Minister, Mr. Madhu Dandavate, today (June 12) made a

candid admission that all had not been well with railway operation.

Despite the advice of the Prime Minister and the exhortations of the Railway Minister, the system continued to function as before. A Minister can make his subordinates work satisfactorily if he can efficiently captain the administrative team working under him. Since both the Prime Minister and Railway Minister woefully lacked it no better results were possible. The outcome of incapability to deal with worsening situations is corruption.

In the states negligence and inefficiency were at their worst; two examples may be cited. When Z.A. Bhutto a former Prime Minister of Pakistan, was hanged Muslim fanatics in Kashmir encouraged and abetted by the ruling party workers attacked followers of Jamati Islami, killed unaccounted number of them including women and children, razed their homes, wiped out a hundred villages and looted property worth lakhs while the National Conference masters feigned ignorance causing terror in the valley. Not much concern was felt in New Delhi at the atrocities perpetrated by Muslim goondas on innocent Muslim victims either through connivance of the authorities or colossal inefficiency of the state government.

More poignant was the tragedy which occurred in Morvi (Gujarat) when after torrential rains for a week the town was submerged by floods causing deaths whose number has been variously estimated between 2000 and 20,000. Deeply shocking was the carelessness and inefficiency of the administration and the rulers who woke up after the deluge subsided. Unbelievably, the American TV telecast the devastation of Morvi town about six hours before the local authorities came even to know about it. After witnessing the horrifying scenes of her native town on the TV screen in Chicago one Mrs. Prafulla telephoned Gujarat Agriculture Minister, Kishubhai Patel, who together with his cabinet colleagues heard about the disaster for the first time from her. Comment is unnecessary.[1]

[1] *The Indian Express*, August 15, 1979.

Not being able to handle serious problems with ability and competence, corruption which was already there in good measure in the centre as well as the states, spread and assumed boundless proportions. In this vice, ministers were found not to be personally above board. Frequently union ministers as well as state ministers were publicly charged with having amassed wealth through dubious means. The puritan Gandhians and their new colleagues of Jana Sangh (RSS) who took pride in being morally superior and unexcelled admirers of Ram Rajya culture felt outraged at being charged of corruption. Such defence fell flat; many politicians including those of the Janata Party itself brought grave charges against the three highups—the Prime Minister Morarji Desai, Home Minister Charan Singh, and Defence Minister Jagjivan Ram—for shielding their kith and kin who resorted to sordid practices in filling their pockets with ill gotten money. These leaders who had set up commissions to investigate charges brought against former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, should not have hesitated to accept institution of an impartial enquiry into the charges against themselves or their relations. If they were sure of their own innocence and honesty of their kinsmen an enquiry would have confirmed it. But they, particularly Morarji, vehemently and indignantly opposed the move until the Rajya Sabha adopted a resolution to take the matter into its own hand. Compelled by circumstances, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister agreed to the appointment of a retired judge of the Supreme Court, Mr. C.A. Vadialingam, to go through the Rajya Sabha debate of August 1978, on the corruption charges brought against the family members of the ministers and say whether any prima facie case existed to proceed with the cases.

The inefficiency of the Government came markedly to the notice of the people when the police revolted in May 1979. It started in the Punjab and spread to almost all parts of the country. Not only were the common policemen involved but the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Central Industry Security Force (CISF) joined the revolt which at places took the form of a mutiny.

The Police had many legitimate grievances which they had been bringing to the notice of the authorities for redressal. They had also been demanding certain rights which were enjoyed by such forces in other democratic countries and by employees in other Indian government departments and industrial labour—increment in salaries, regularisation of promotions, privilege leave, fixed working hours, weekly holidays, housing accommodation, permission to form associations, etc. Memoranda had been submitted to the authorities from time to time in this connection but there was no satisfactory response and the matter remained hanging fire until the day of the revolt. The Government had no doubt appointed a six-member National Police Commission (NPC) comprising top police personnel and social scientists headed by M.R. Dharmvira, a former governor. But the commission went about its work so leisurely as not to inspire any confidence or assurance in policemen.

The constabulary which was in some states joined by officers of lower ranks, protested by carrying out processions and holding public meetings blandly expressing grievances and stridently making demands. At many places the policemen joined the agitation in uniform. The nervous governments called out Army to deal with the situation, disarm policemen and take charge of the armoury. There were clashes; at Bokaro 22 men were killed and 100 injured on June 25 as the Army fought with CISF men. In Delhi on the same day in a clash between the Army and CRPF three people died. Riots and antigovernment demonstrations are not uncommon in present-day India but are reported almost daily in the Press. The police revolt, however, sent waves of panic through the country because this time it were the guardians of law who had risen against the law and defied it. It had never happened before in the history of Independent India.

On the one hand the government putting on a brave face took stringent action against the mutineers by disbanding some battalions, dismissing agitators and imprisoning their leaders, on the other it became so panicky that in some states almost all the demands were granted within days of the revolt.

"More than half a million policemen will get benefits", reported UNI on June 28, "amounting to Rs. 50 crores a year under the measures announced by state governments in the wake of their agitation".

Though the Prime Minister Desai assured the nation that the police agitation will end in a couple of months it lingered on for a much longer period and it is doubtful if the Indian police can ever again be the same disciplined body as it was before May 1979. This is the result of the inefficient handling of a serious problem by the government. "Much to the chagrin of the Prime Minister, Mr. Moraji Desai", reported *Express News Service*, "the Union Minister for Petroleum and Chemicals, Mr. H. N. Bahuguna, characterised the police unrest in the country as the failure of the Government at the special meeting of the Union Cabinet (June 27, 1979)." Bahuguna was believed to have observed that the administration had loosened at every level and the public was rightly indignant over it.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Disenchantment and Frustration

Assuming power, the Janata leaders were convinced that Indira Gandhi had been driven out of the political field once and for all and that her surviving popularity in the southern states would not take long to vanish; they went about their business with hope, enthusiasm and zest. But lacking honesty, humility, efficiency, spirit of modernity and faith in human values, they encountered ungovernable problems at every step and on every side. They subconsciously perceived within weeks of handling reins of authority that stress on dogmas, traditions and values of ancient culture was pushing them into deep waters. Yet not having known any better ideology and having become thoroughly accustomed to religious mode of life and medieval ways of thought they could not help going ahead on their chosen path.

The really great and only service the Janata leaders rendered to democracy was restoration of freedom of expression. But this was done more to discredit Indira Gandhi and the Congress regime in the eyes of the people than for love of democracy or through courage of conviction; it took them many months to remove all impediments and abrogate the MISA. When it was eventually done the states were asked to have Preventive Detention Acts which they had pledged in their election manifes not to have in any case.

The Janata rulers took measures in the spheres of politics, economics, education and culture betraying their antediluvian attitude and anti-democratic bias. Though during electioneering the Janata leaders vociferously spoke about their democratic aims and assured the people of their high ideals it took very little time for them to come out in their

true colours in every field of social activity.

The evil features of neo-Brahminism which had been consciously introduced or had surreptitiously crept in under Congress rule got prominence. Political programmes, economic plans and social welfare schemes invariably started with Hindu religious ceremonies. Secular India was virtually converted into Hindu Rashtra (Hindu State). Suppression of Untouchables, Muslims, Christians and other non-Hindu minorities became pronounced; progressives were particularly harassed.

High caste Hindus were emboldened by Janata sectarian policies to do as they liked; attacks on low caste people particularly the untouchables, increased in frequency; they not only continued to be deprived of human rights but also their houses were looted and burned; sometime whole villages were wiped out, hundreds were murdered and thousands intimidated. The reports of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes bitterly criticising government policy went unheeded. On February 8, 1978, replying to an address by the People's Education and Cultural Society in Madras, Jagjivan Ram, Union Minister, admitted that "hold of Brahminism was so strong on Indian society that it was forcing many in the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes to leave the Hindu Society". He gave a call to untouchables and other backward classes not to invite Brahmin priests on religious occasions and functions. He paid tributes to Tamil Nadu for "having succeeded in getting rid of the Brahmins". He lamented that such was not the case in North India.

Inaugurating a conference of Harijan Sewak Sangh on May 8, 1979, in Lucknow, Jagjivan Ram admitted that "the evil of untouchability continued to exist in the country. Casteism had grown into huge proportions despite all efforts to end it. In fact casteism had affected and afflicted all religions in India". The Union Shipping Minister, Chand Ram, addressing a gathering on Dr. Ambedkar's birth anniversary at Saharanpur on the same day acknowledged that "casteism had increased during the last three years and influenced political life and voting trends during elections".

Almost all scheduled caste and backward class MPs from Uttar Pradesh told B.P. Mandal, Chairman of the Backward Classes Commission, that despite so much noise made over the welfare of the backward classes "we have remained where we were 32 years ago." Some felt that their lot had in fact deteriorated over the years.[1]

The condition of other minorities was no better. Hindu-Muslim riots occurred oftener. Writing sarcastically how we were travelling towards communal harmony N.L. Chawla, a knowledgeable publicist, revealed : "Last year witnessed a sudden spurt in incidence of communal violence. While the total number of such incidents was 190 in 1977 and only 169 in 1976 it rose to 230 in 1978. Even though Uttar Pradesh and Bihar topped the list in 1978, with 46 and 34 incidents respectively. proportionately a sharper increase was reported from certain states in South India ; Andhra Pradesh 6 in 1977 to 22 in 1978, Kerala 11 to 17, and Tamil Nadu from 4 to 14. Also the number of persons killed in communal riots in 1978 was three times more than that in 1977. According to official figures 110 persons lost their lives in 1978 as against 36 in the previous year".[2]

At Aligarh and Jamshedpur in April-June, the riots were horrifying and continued more or less for months, the authorities unable to control the situation.

According to the *Indian Express* Correspondent "as many as 36 communal riots taking a total toll of 84 lives have been reported in Uttar Pradesh during the past two years. Aligarh reported four riots with forty-four deaths, Moradabad two riots with 20 deaths; Varanasi three riots with ten deaths; Kanpur five riots with three deaths; Allahabad two riots and two deaths; Gonda three riots with one death; Bareilly three riots with two deaths; Azam Garh and Jalaun one riot with one death each."[3]

Girilal Jain, Editor *Times of India*, writing under the

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[1] *The Indian Express*, May 8, 1979.

[2] *Ibid.*, July 20, 1979.

[3] *Ibid.*, June 21, 1979.

caption "Revival of Communalism" and pointing to the warning singnals, loud and clear, said :

> Aftet Aligarh and Jamshedpur, it is no longer possible to ignore the revival of the threat to the nation's future. The Muslims may not yet feel as frightened as they did in the sixties. But they have already shown signs of retreating into their shell.

Appropriately, Jain hinted that the deterioration had been caused by the different outlook if not the basic differences, in the two major political parties of India :

> The difference between the two parties is there for any discerning observer to see. By comparison with the Congress, the Janata represents the forces of social, cultural and economic retrogression.

It was widely reported that in the communal riots RSS has had a hidden hand and that its volunteers had infiltrated in the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) which was posted in Aligarh. The Constabulary assisted Hindu communalists in attacking the Muslims possibly because they had the guarantee that with Jan Sangh (RSS) sharing power in the Central Government as well as in the the Uttar Pradesh Government, no authority dare take them to task. Their hopes were not misplaced ; not even a warning was administered to the Constabulary for the criminality of its members. Kuldip Nayar, who toured the riot torn Jamshedpur reported :

> In Jamshedpur there is enough evidence to prove that the Bihar Military Police, the main armed force in the city at the time of riots did not initially obey the order to fire on the unruly mob of Hindus in the Mango Muslim Area on April 11, the first day of trouble. I have it on unimpeachable sources that orders for firing were disobeyed more than once . . . Then there are many examples where the Bihar Military Police (BMP) openly sided with the Hindus in rioting and looting.[1]

Not that the tragedy in Aligarh and Jamshedpur like many others in 190 communal riots could not be averted : but

[1] *Indian Express*, April 25, 1979.

the authorities for reasons best known to them sat quietly until the conflagration enveloped the two hapless cities.

Said Justice M.R.A. Ansari, Chairman of the Minorities Commission :

> It was distressing to note that the happenings there (in Jamshedpur) had followed a pattern not dissimilar to the one that rocked Aligarh not so long ago, with this difference that in Jamshedpur the tragedy was on a much larger scale. In both cases there were hints of disaffection among the people because of grievances against those responsible for the maintenance of law and order—the PAC in the one case and BMP in the other. In a recurring pattern that was becoming all too familiar the local authorities had been caught napping once again. The situation had been dangerously tense for quite some time before the actual breakdown of law and order. There were clear indications, too, that the situation could well explode into violence and even sovagery as highly-charged situations eventually tend to do, unless effective and timely steps are taken to avert the confrontation that seems otherwise inevitable.[1]

The communal situation became so agonizing that the President, Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy, expressed concern and took Home Minister, H.M. Patel and Home Secretary, T.C.A. Srinivasa Vardhan, to task when they met him on May 4.[2]

Since maintenance of law and order is the responsibility of the states, the Central Government thought it advisable to write to the states making suggestions for controlling the worsening comunal situation. But states evinced little interest in it; they either took no step or acted according to their own prejudices.

Among the recommendations of the Centre were : Arms licences to undesirable persons should be denied; experienced officers of proven ability should be stationed in the communally sensitive districts; the apprehensions of the minority communities should be allayed, their confidence in the administration inspired; close vigilance kept over communal relations and taking timely action and preventing any tension from escala-

[1] *The Hindustan Times*, May 5, 1979.
[2] *Ibid.*, May 5, 1979.

tion into communal violence. Similarly a close watch be kept on communal press and effective steps taken against communal writings tending to create dissatisfaction among communities. None of the suggestions was acted upon.

Prime Minister Morarji Desai with the consultation of opposition leaders, decided that location of police and imposition of collective fines on aggressive localities fomenting communal trouble should be seriously considered. But it was totally ignored by the states.[1]

Two teams were despatched on May 16 to communally-prone districts in the country and they were of the unanimous view that the states were indifferent to the Centre's advice. The teams discovered that some states were even unaware of the Centre's proposals or, worse still, were doing the opposite to what was contained in the directives of the Central Government.

In their helplessness, the Central Government could think of nothing else but to repeat the suggestions and add some more in the light of new developments and experiences. In a letter despatched in early June to the chief ministers and Lt. Governors, Home Minister H.M. Patel pointed out some basic inadequacies in the existing arrngements which, he insisted, should be removed on a priority basis : First, how best to give substantial representation to the minority communities in the police force; second, effective implementation of the recommendation of National Integration Council and other commissions of enquiry to deal with the communal situation in various states; third, the adequacy and posting of the intelligence setup at the state headquarters; fourth, more meaningful use of home guards and civil defence volunteers; and, fifth, steps taken to insure constructive cooperation from the political parties, the Press and local social organisations. These suggestions too did not meet a better fate at the hands of state governments.[2]

Due to its static caste character Hinduism is not a

[1] *The Indian Express*, May 30, 1979.

[2] *Ibid.*, June 10, 1979.

proslytising religion. There is historical evidence that non-Hindus who desired to embrace Hinduism were contemptuously treated and not allowed to do so by Brahmins. At the fall of Hindu rule in Kashmir in the fourteenth century, Renchena a Ladakhi Buddhist by birth, who captued the throne and was recognised as the monarch by all classes of people, implored local Brahmins to convert him to Hinduism but the request was brusquely rejected because conversion of a non-Hindu to Hinduism was not allowed in Hindu religion. Renchena became the first Muslim king of Kashmir when the Muslim saint Bulbul Shah welcomed him in the fold of the faithful. Even so, Hindus always felt indignant at the conversion of their coreligionists to other religions. Under the Muslim and the British rules they were helpless to do anything. Half-hearted attempts were made by reformist sections like Arya Samaj to reconvert apostates and even to convert non-Hindus to Hindu faith, but such movements were not a success because of the inherent repulsion in Hindu society to conversion or reconversion which would disturb heirarchy of caste system.

After independence, Hindu leaders thought that if they are unable to convert non-Hindus to Hinduism they could under new dispensation debar Hindus from being converted even if they honestly felt attracted by noble ideals and humanitarian work of non-Hindu missionaries as well as the equal and compassionate treatment they received after embracing new faiths. Laws were, therefore, adopted to stop conversions. To begin with, foreign Christian missionaries were disallowed to preach the gospel particularly among illiterate and backward tribals; later, missionaries were forced to leave the country. Even such kind-hearted men and women who were very popular for the good work they had done among the local suffering people where they functioned, were ordered to leave the shores of India. But the work was devotedly carried on by the Indian missionaries and the disinherited in the Brahmin society continued to embrace Christianity in good numbers.

Emboldened by the illiberal and partial policy of the Janata Government more drastic steps were taken by some state governments to stop conversions. In Arunachal Pradesh

a law called Arunachal Freedom of Religion Act, 1978, was passed involving grave risks in attempting conversion of Hindus. But that was not all; churches were destroyed and newly converted men and women were ill treated and tortured when they firmly refused to go back to Hindu fold. On a fact-finding mission in the wake of Union Home Minister's denial in the Lok Sabha on March 27, that any church was burnt down or any person tortured, a delegation of Parliament members—Mrs. Rano Shaiza, G.S. Reddi, P.A. Sangama and Hopingstone Lyngdoh—toured Arunachal; they contacted people of all classes and various shades of opinion and faiths recording only such statements which were supported by documents. The delegation met a few who had been jailed for embracing Christianity and were forced in prison to sign statements renouncing the faith; their kucha churchs had been demolished in their absence. Prior permission under the Act is required to build churchs and temples of faiths other than what are euphemistically called indigenous, but actually mean Hindu religion. The delegation reported :

> While Christian educational and other institutions are not permitted to start schools, the Arunachal Government spent Rs. 8 crores during the two years of Janata rule to maintain schools run by Ramakrishna and Sarada Missions, Vivekanand Kendra and other groups.

This contradicted the statement of the Lt.-Governor made on April 11 that the Government's policy is non-religious and non-political. The delegation concluded :

> Physical torture, discrimination and harassment were resorted to force Christians to revert back to their ancestral faith in Arunachal Pradesh.

Apart from severity of the law, some zealots among the Hindus tortured converts in a savage manner. For example, one Mrs. Teli Eku of Kamling village, a new convert to Christianity, was captured from her home, stripped and hung upside down at the market place in presence of hundreds and rediculed for her new faith. A similar treatment was meted

out to Mr. Techi Tara and Mr. Techi Kulu of Kapal village. The torture and terror temporarily halted conversions.

A Jan Sangh stalwart, O.P. Tyagi M.P., got inspiration from the Arunachal experiment to have a bill introduced with the blessings of the puritan Gandhians in the Lok Sabha so that conversions are stopped all over the country for good with intimidation, torture and terror. The bill is deceptively called "Freedom of Religion Bill" but its contents are not dissimilar to Arunachal Act and indeed are stricter though couched in ambiguous terms.

On the surface, the Tyagi bill seeks to prevent conversion by force, fraud or intimidation. But the meaning given to these words would make even voluntary and genuine change in faith illegal and therefore punishable in law.

The bill justifiably spread a wave of resentment in all non-Hindu minorities particularly among the Christians who are doing social service on a large scale throughout the country which has been praised by all unbiased and impartial people. Hundreds of protesting demonstrations were held denouncing the bill. Protestants joined hands with Roman Catholics and Archbishops with laity in expressing resentment. Even Mother Terersa, the winner of Jawaharlal Nehru Award for her unparalleled compassionate work, raised her voice against the bill; for even she could be arrested by an Inspector of Police under the provisions of the bill, in spite of her excellent humanitarian work to bring peace to the dying and the destitute which came wthin the mischief of the bill.[1]

Memorunda were presented to the Government pleading withdrawal of the bill but to no purpose. Prime Minister Morarji Desai rejected the demand saying that he favoured the principles underlying the bill. He told a delegation of Delhi Christians on May 14, 1979, that "while the present bill would not be accepted his government would support another bill in a somewhat similar form.[2]

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[1] Mother Teresa has been awarded Nobel Prize for Peace while this book was under print.

[2] *The Indian Express*, May 15, 1979.

When the Indian Constitution was in the making in 1947-50, Reverend Father Jerome De Souza representing Indian Christians declared that the community did not require any constitutional safeguard to protect its minority rights because it reposed complete confidence in the sense of fairness and justice of the Hindus. The Christian community rejected the offer of protective provisions and constitutional guarantes by prominent national leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru.

It must, however, be recorded that a number of liberal and reasonable individuals belonging to different sections of Hindu Society expressed their strong dissent regarding the proposed Freedom of Relgion Bill. Expressing his apprehensions about the latest developments in Hindu-non-Hindu relations, Kuldip Nayar commented:

> It may become a fashion to be fanatic, parochial or narrow-minded The climate is already getting vitiated. Never have I heard so many people expressing communal views as I have these days. I have a feeling that secular forces are getting weakened and communalists are gaining ground. Minorities are specially perturbed because the impression left on them by the two bills (Cow Slaughter Bill and Freedom of Religion Bill) is that the Hindus who constitute the majority in the country are now less and less bothered about their sentiments.

Nayar said that the way prejudice, bias, and fanaticism have come to find expression suggests increasing bigotry. "Communal spokesmen, both Hindu and Muslim, no longer sound defensive. The veneer of secularism seems to be rubbing off considering the low ambitions that guided all the constituent parties forming Janata to oust Indira. Gandhi and her associates from power; it is no wonder that despite tall sounding pledges given in their election manifesto, not only that there was no improvement in any social sphere but deterioration set in only a few months of their assumption of power."

Kuldip Nayar is labouring under delusion if he believes there can ever be secularism under Ram Rajya.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

End of Janata Experiment

Within a few months of its coming to power, Janata Party exposed its many weaknesses and the people who voted it to power began to contemplate if they had chosen rightly or only made their future darker by handing over reins of administration into incapable and undeserving hands. Because Janata leaders claimed to be true followers of Mahatma Gandhi and cherished faith in his political, economic, social and cultural programmes which, it was asserted, had been disregaded by the Congress leaders, the people pinned high hopes in the new rulers. But before long these hopes were dashed one after another and disillusionment made its way among people. It became pronounced when many tall pledges given by the Janata Party in their election manifesto remained unredeemed and the leaders lackadaisically trampled upon them.

Voices began to be raised protesting against the anti-people policies, primitive programmes and mismanagement of state affairs, and when these went unheard and conditions progressively deteriorated protests yielded place to strikes, demonstrations and satyagrahas which became daily occurrences in various parts of the country. It left no alternative for the Government but to suppress these with police force; lathi charges, bursting of teargas shells and, in the last resort, firings which sometimes caused deaths of some demonstrators and injuries to many others. However, this did not solve any problem but only added to the fury of the victimised, discontented and angry multitudes.

Within three months of its rule the Janata Party's decline was evident when elections were held in the states in June as referred to earlier and it was known that everywhere the

percentage of votes secured by the Janata was less than it had been able to obtain in the Lok Sabha election. On the other hand, Indira Congress had bettered its position. It showed that there was a growing disillusionment with the Janata. It afforded an opportunity though very insignificant yet, to Indira Gandhi and her close associates to stage a comeback.

While it had taken ten years for Indira Gandhi to earn unpopularity and reproach, the Janata leaders fell in the estimation of their countrymen in less than a couple of years. For the greater part of this short period people's wrath had been simmering in minds ready to explode. Early in 1979, it blew up and a number of events led to expression of bitterness when a vote of no confidence was moved in the Lok Sabha in its monsoon session by Y. B. Chavan, leader of the oppostion.

Having witnessed the blossoming of Ram Rajya and tasted its fruits for two years the people got fed up with life under it. Voices of protest from all parts of the country and from leaders of different political parties including intelligent and farsighted Janata men were being heard daily; protests were becoming noisier day after day.

The euphoria which seized Indians when Indira Gandhi was defeated at the polls and Janata installed in power completely vanished. Jayaprakash Narayan expressed more than once his anguish at the infighting of Janata leaders and the failure of the Government to fulfil the pledges given to the people in Janata election manifesto and at the oath-taking ceremony at Gandhiji's samadhi at Raj Ghat. He addressed several letters to the Prime Minister in this behalf. In his three-page communication sent in early June,1979, Jayaprakash dwelt upon various aspects of the political situation. He referred to the Janata Government's failure to check corruption. The Aligarh and Jamshedpur incidents, in Jayaprakash's opinion, indicated that communalism was raising its head again. He said that "after two years, the people who had installed the Janata government in power had come to feel that their hopes had been belied."

Even by the end of 1978 it was clear to every impartial observer that the Janata Party had no programme of its own

in any field of social activity, be it economic, political, social or cultural. Aptly it was called a non-performing government. Notwithstanding its repeated appeals in support of Gandhian philosophy of life it adopted the plans of the predecessor government, the only difference being that Janata was half-hearted in doing so while the Congress was sincerely eager to work them. The people could not help observing that Janata was reluctantly following Nehru and its policies were at best a carbon copy of the latter's policies. It is worthy of note that in the Janata ranks authoritarianism was fast growing and taking the same path which had ultimately led Indira Gandhi's Government to impose emergency.

On the occasion of the second anniversary of lifting of the emergency an "anti-authoritarianism day" was observed jointly by such pro-Janata bodies as Gandhi Peace Foundation, Citizens for Democracy, National People's Committee, Serva Seva Sangh and Servants of the People Society. The meeting created a co-ordination committee to strengthen democracy. Addressing a press conference the chairman of the committee, V.M. Tarkunde, said :

> The (re)emergence of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, clash of personalities in the ruling Janata Party, increasing but unfulfilled expectations of the people and centralisation of political and economic power might pose a threat to democracy and give place to authoritarianism.

When Janata won the elections, Tarkunde was overwhelmed with joy. He entertained no doubt whatsoever that a new progressive era had dawned. He wrote in April, 1977, issue of *Radical Humanist* :

> Revolution can be defined as a social change of a fundamental nature which takes place over a short period of time. In that sense India has gone through a *glorious revolution.* (emphasis mine).

In March 1979, Tarkunde ruefully observed :

> It (Janata philosophy) is the approach of a benevolent dictator, who wants unrestricted power to make such laws as according to him

would benefit his people.[1]

Earlier I have referred to the confession of George Fernandes, Minister for Industry, that india is passing through pre-emergency conditions. Such views were held by other members of the Council of Ministers at the Centre. But discretion (some call it cowardice) prevented them from coming out with statements expressing their honest opinions.

However, if the ministers lacked courage other forces were rising to challenge the Janata Party and its Government to fulfill pledges given in the election manifesto or quit.

On May 26, the traders in Lucknow observed hartal demanding abolition of sales tax as assured in the election manifesto. Even restaurants and hotels remained closed. The city wore a deserted look and petty shopkeepers also kept their shutters down. The traders brought out a procession and held a big public meeting. There were lathi charges on the demonstrators by the police who also resorted to firing; some agitators were injured. It led to the escalation of the agitation and soon not only was the entire state of U.P. involved in it but also traders of other states joined the fray. Two Janata Party MPs, Kanwar Lal Gupta and Shiv Narain Sarsonia in a joint statement, on May 29, appealed to the Party President, Chandra Shekhar, to direct chief ministers of all Janata ruled states to abolish sales tax altogether but the proposal was unacceptable to the Party bosses.

The members of minority communities were very unhappy for the partisan attitude of the authorities during the days of communal disturbances and the centre's helpless-

[1] Tarkunde is a Radical Humanist and one of my old and valued colleagues. But I have had fundamental differences with him over the role of Janata. We had an exchange of letters on the issue. The correspondence has been included in my another publication entitled *The Indian Dilemma* to be issued later. It throws light on the basic social problems which have to be solved before Indian politics can be successfully democratised. Tarkunde, thought otherwise. But subsequent events have not supported his thesis.

ness and inability to do justice. Deterioration in law and order situation incensed not only well to do sections but also common men and women who found themselves insecure in home and unsafe on the roads. Home Minister H.M. Patel confessed on May 13 that "the progress of the country would be at stake if acts of indiscipline and violence now being witnessed continue". Addressing the annual general meeting of the Bharat Chamber of Commerce, Patel observed : "No country could progress in a situation where law and order remained a problem, where sectional, communal and parochial interests overshadowed social goals and where the ordinary business of life was continually threatened with disruption by powerful and organised groups". Conveniently Patel forgot that the main burden for the unhappy developments rested on the Ministry which he headed.

The allround decline especially the appalling law and order situation under the puritan rule was a warning signal of what was to come. "The Government is thinking of reviving MISA", declared an influential Janata M.P., Kanwar Lal Gupta, who was very close to Prime Minister Morarji and probably spoke with his knowledge. Gupta said that this drastic law was necessary to deal with anti-social elements and law-breakers. Of course, like Congress leaders in 1974-75, Gupta stressed, that MISA will not be used against political workers and trade unions. But Indians have had sufficient unpleasant experience that such barbarous laws were ultimately used unflinchingly and with vigour to suppress political dissent and opposition.

In a press conference on June 25, Prime Minister Morarji Desai disclosed that despite assurances given in the election manifesto to the contrary, his Government had decided to introduce Preventive Detention Bill in the Lok Sabha. P.D. Acts had already been promulgated in some states. But this was considered insufficient to wrestle with the developing grave situation. Desai took pains to explain that the new enactment would not be like MISA but would avoid the arbitrary and dreadful provisions of the latter. He tried to ignore the fact that when first adopted by the

Congress Government in early seventies, MISA was not as dreadful as it was made after imposition of the emergency. Morarji Desai was using similar language which Indira Gandhi spoke while introducing MISA for the first time which subsequently served as the main instrument of tyranny, oppression and suppression working havoc. Commented *Hindustan Times* on June 26 : "To argue the need for such extraordinary powers is to confess an administrative failure".

Desai's declaration angered not a few among his own Party men besides the entire opposition in and outside the Parliament. In what respect is Janata Government different from the emergency regime, they asked? Madhu Limaye, a top Janata leader, said on June 29 that he was totally opposed to the idea of reintroducing the Preventive Detention Act and if such a bill were to come in Parliament, "I will opposed it tooth and nail." He accused Janata leadership of having taken the nation to a state of acute crisis and warned that if immediate remedial measures were not taken "there is every danger of the country slipping into disorder".

Kuldip Nayar, who suffered imprisonment for opposing authoritarianism of Indira Gandhi, and therefore supported Janata, wrote on May 16 :

> Eruptions in the country are increasing. They may not be too serious but they are persisting. A communal riot here or a strike there is building up an atmosphere of insecurity. The cumulative effect is that of fear and uncertainty; as if there is no sense of direction, as if things are getting out of hand . . . Law and order has broken down in large parts of the country . . . there is hardly any respect for law or authority and the line drawn between right and wrong got erased long ago. At the slightest of provocations the people carry issues to the streets in the form of a procession, demonstration or hartal . . . In some ways the country is in the danger of regressing towards the kind of situation obtaining in 1973 and 1974 which preceded the Emergency.[1]

Not in his usual flippant and vulgar manner but in a rare moment of serenity, Raj Narain, former Health Minister

[2] *The Indian Express*; May 16, 1979.

and a general secretary of the Janata Party, advised Janata members of the Lok Sabha to go to Raj Ghat again on October 2, 1979, and (collectively) burn a copy of the pledge taken by them in the name of Mahatma Gandhi, (before the Janata Government was officially sworn in).

That the opponents of the Janata Party like leaders of Congress (I) were increasingly becoming vociferous in denouncing the ruling party and charging it with ruining India is little surprise. But it is notable what the once devoted and dedicated but now disenchanted Janata men publicly said about the decline of their party.

C.B. Gupta, a former chief minister of U.P. and treasurer of the Janata Party, could not help observing on June 8, that the country was fast drawing towards anarchy for which none else but those men of "my tribe are responsible who are currently at the helm of affairs." He lashed out at the present crop of politicians for having spun a fine web of confusion and uncertainty in the country which was almost at the brink of disaster.[1]

The future of Janata mainly rested first on its ability to unify the different constituent groups which formed it, and to be able to give the country a stable government. In this it failed dismally. Secondly, the Janata had to demonstrate that its ideals, principles and style of work were *qualitatively* different and morally higher than that of the Congress. But in a few months after assuming power it became clear alike to its friends and foes that the Janata was no better than the Congress in whatever steps it took to rejuvenate the political, economic, social or cultural life of the people. Its slogan "Back to Gandhi" did not carry any conviction to the downtrodden; the name of the Mahatma was dragged into party fued and the lingering popularity of the hero of freedom struggle exploited only to strengthen Janata hold on the gullible, ignorant multitudes. It is appropriate to quote here the finding of the pro-Janata co-authors of the *India's Ballot-*

[1] *The Times of India*, June 9, 1979.

Box Revolution who hopefully and closely watched the sayings and doings of the party for a year :

> The euphoria of the March election is now a thing of the past, a memory to be recorded by the chronicler and commented on by the historian of the future. It has left a void which has been filled by dissatisfaction with the failures of the Government and a general sense of futility. There is a feeling that after all there is not much to choose between the Janata Party and the Congress. Janata leaders took an oath to follow the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and time and again his name is invoked like an incantation. It looks as though India has rediscovered Mahatma Gandhi, having deviated from the spirit of his work for three decades.

The authors add : "It is unnecssary to pinpoint the 'trouble spots' which irk the citizen and leave him frustrated. Every time he is faced with inordinate delay or receives rough treatment, he expresses his annoyance by saying : 'This country needs only an emergency' ". It is the finding of the authors that the humble folk ask : "How have we gained by putting the Janata government in power. What has happened to the ballot-box revolution—has it been arrested or have we been betrayed" ? [1]

From the day Janata Party was formed in 1977 there never was any cohesion among its constituent groups though all of them were committed to dissolve their respective identities and get merged in the Party to stabilise national politics. But while paying lip-service to the unity the different groups not only continued their separate existence but, what was worse still, they held group meetings from time to time to take decisions of their own concerning vital problems confronting the nation. Such manner of functioning created schism in the Janata Party because occasionally in the beginning but frequently later on, the separate decisions of the groups contradicted with each other leading to squabbles and clashes. It forced ministers of the government to speak against one another in public and

1 *India's Ballot-Box Revolution*, P. 439.

even on the floor of Parliament to the consternation of their followers if not the ministers themselves. The dawn of 1979 witnessed the culmination of this process when the joint responsibility of the cabinet members was thrown to the winds and individual ministers aired their views freely in utter disregard of the consequences which followed such behaviour. The incompetent but complacent Morarji Desai looked on helplessly and even unconcernedly.

The most important factor which brought about disrupture in the Janata Party was the polarisation of views on Jan Sangh's dual loyalty, one to the Janata Party and the other to RSS. Non-Jan Sangh groups demanded that Jan Sangh members should openly relinquish their adherence to RSS or else leave the Janata Party. But Jan Sanghis refused to do so ; they would neither disown RSS ideology nor leave the Janata.

It aggravated the situation and gave rise to a crisis which deepened with passing of every day. Being his supporters and main prop on which he relied in the power struggle now waging furiously, Prime Minister Desai defended Jan Sanghis. His colleagues like Chandra Shekhar, Party President, and Jagivan Ram, Junior Deputy Prime Minister, faithfully stood by him.

But others like Charan Singh, Senior Deputy Prime Minister, and Raj Narain along with their followers, opposed Morarji Desai and demanded his ouster. The Janata Party began to totter.

When the Janata ship began to sink its members like rats one by one or in small groups began to desert it. The first to do so with a bang was the notorious disruptor Raj Narain whom the Prime Minister had refused to take back in his cabinet even when Morarji relented in the case of Charan Singh after a good deal of hesitation, by accepting him as Senior Deputy Prime Minister. Raj Narain had therefore sworn to take revenge and overthrow Prime Minister Desai. Sometime later Narain declared to destroy the Janata Party itself along with the removal of the Prime Minister.

On June 20, Raj Narain issued a statement declaring

his disassociation with the Janata Party. He said:

> In a sense it is wrong to say that that I am leaving the Party for there is no party. My object to leave this non-existent Party is to build a real Janata Party of our dreams.

Explaining the reasons for his adopting this course, Narain said :

> The struggle that we had raised against authoritarianism, however, seems to have largely gone in vain and authorirtaianism of worst type is now raising its head and conditions that existed before and during emergency are being recreated with vengeance by the Prime Minister aided by the fascist communal forces and subservient organisational setup.

Raj Narain added:

> Virtually there is no government in the country today. In all, almost all, critical departments it is chaos and inaction that rules—coal, power, steel, cement, railways and airways. We are on the verge of a complete breakdown. To cap it all, there is near-collapse of the civil authority as evidenced by police revolt and in CRP. Communal riots are proving to be beyond control. In north-eastern regions the handling by the Prime Minister has brought about uprising. The confiict there has been aggravated by the Freedom of Religlion Bill.

Raj Narain's quitting the Party must have appeared a good riddance to Morarji Desai who had scant regard for his personality. But from the next day groups of MPs followed Raj Narain in deserting the party and joining him. It perturbed Janata highups but not the ostrich-like Prime Minister who as believer in Ram Rajya placed his trust in Providence. Some of the Prime Minister's colleagues concluded that there was crisis of confidence. But Desai discounted such an assertion and, indeed, told the Press on July 25 that Janata Party was undergoing consolidation with the exit of Raj Narain. Chandra Shekhar, President Janata Party, profoundly disagreed with the Prime Minister in the assessment of the political situation. He pointed out in a Press Conference on June 26, that in January 1977 Mrs. Gandhi's party appeared the most consolidated

political force; "we all saw what happened to her party". As regards crisis of confidence Shekhar said individual self confidence did not represent peoples confidence. "For the failure of the Government we should not find alibi".

When an increasing number of MPs joined Raj Narain in the next few days, the country was disgusted. The number of his followers rose to no fewer than 81 which was perhaps beyond even his owen expectation. The Prime Minister called it defections but it was verily a split in the party. Raj Narain formed a new party called Janata Party (Secular). The Prime Minister pretended to ignore it. But when along with the desertion of the MPs five cabinet ministers and eight ministers of state also submitted their resignations, the Prime Minister was persuaded to step down and let the crisis pass off. But he was adamant not to do so. On July 14, he claimed that the resolution of non-confidence against his Government would be defeated by 100 votes in the Lok Sabha; therefore he urged that the issue be decided on the floor of the House. But the next 24 hours worsened the crisis by more resignations of ministers and MPs and then the obstinate Desai realized that it was less disgraceful for him to step down than to be thrown out by an overwhelming number of votes in the Lok Sabha.

On July 15, in the evening Morarji Desai went to the Rashtrapati Bhawan and submitted his resignation to Neelam Sanjiva Reddy, President of India, who at once accepted it but asked him to stay on as care-taker Prime Minister until the next incumbent of the post was chosen. "Morarji Desai himself must shoulder much of the blame(for the crisis)" commented the *Guardian* (London) on July 16 in an editorial. "He was too old to fit his octogenarian philosophies to the bewildering patterns of modern India, too autocratic to head the complex Janata team, too dependent on the parties of Hindu extremism in a scarred, secular state, too forbidding and controversial a figure to convey a sense of national leadership."

Like most other puritans, Morarji's fall was not only from political power but also from the high moral principles which he loudly professed and flaunted in the face of his

friends and foes. It was a sorry spectacle to see this foremost Gandhian manoeuvring by underhand methods to maintain the Prime Ministership even after he had resigned and acknowledged that he had lost the confidence of the majority of Parliamentarians. He refused to yield the leadership of the Janata Parliamentary Party and once more stake his claim to form the government. Bewailing the unseemly conduct of Desai pro-Janata *Indian Express* remarked on July 17 in an editorial :

> With the search for a new government to replace the discredited administration of Mr. Morarji Desai not more than a day old, the country is already getting a taste of the rapid decline in values that has overtaken the political scene.
>
> For a political veteran who has always proclaimed his adherence to Gandhian principles a recourse to such stratagems when the party has all but publicly expressed its loss of confidence in him is another sad illustration of the rat race to which our politics has been reduced.

Referring to public reaction to the fall of Janata Government the *Indian Express* wrote on July 28, 1979:

> As may have been expected from the lack-lustre record of Mr. Morarji Desai's government in the 27 months that it was in office, there is little regret among the people at the collapse of the Janata experiment. The targedy is that the collapse was seen to be coming at least a year before it did and the Party looked on helplessly refusing to face squarely the problem of Mr. Desai's proven inadequacy as a leader.

Commented the *Statesman* editorially on July 18:

> Most of our political leaders have shown little respect for principles even while mouthing platitudes, but to descend to the level of making friends of enemies merely to achieve political power would be a despicable act. Or are we to believe that "democracy", "authoritarianism" and "socialism" are mere words to lull a credulous public to sleep while politicians set about feathering their own nests.

In early 1974 when British Prime Minister Attlee introduced the bill in the Parliament to grant independence to

Indian subcontinent, Winston Churchill who has been considered to be the greatest statesman of the twentieth century but never liked by Indian politicians, remarked:

> Liberty is man's birthright. However, to give the reins of government to the Congress at this juncture is to hand over the destiny of hungry millions into the hands of rascals, rogues and freebooters. Not a bottle of water or a loaf of bread shall escape taxation, only the air will be free and the blood of hungry millions will be on the head of Mr. Attllee. India will be lost in the political squabbles.

The harsh tone of these observations of the famous man infuriated Indian nationalists at the time but today the words are, significantly, differently evaluated. Scores of letters are appearing in the Press in support of what Churchill said. As an exmple I may quote Noshir H. Nagarwala who in a letter to the *Indian Express* in September, 1979, expressed :

> When I first read these (Churchill's) words over thirty years ago I was furious. I am sure many other Indians like me might have shared the same feeling and felt terribly insulted. Nevertheless. when I remember the same words again after so many years in the light of what is going on in Indian politics today I cannot help feeling that the dear old man was, after all not so wrong.[1]

It is unnessary to give other rueful quotations. Even Chaudhry Charan Singh admitted publicly some years ago while launching Bharatiya Lok Dal that "the fall in most standards that India has witnessed during this period and the fact that two-thirds of our people are not able to get even bread prove that he (Churchill) was not far wrong."[2]

[1] *The Indian Express.* September 12, 1979.
[2] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Where Do We Go From Here?

I have tried to narrate briefly the political, economic and cultural history of post-independence India from a viewpoint which to me appears real and objective. In my opinion the country is in a blind alley from which no one among the leaders who count knows how to rescue it.

The potentialities of the ideology that guided nationalists, most of whom derive satisfaction in also claiming to be socialists, have been exhausted without the people having reached anywhere near the goal of progressive, prosperous and happy India which was set before the country after achievement of liberation from foreign rule. Mahatma Gandhi's Ram Rajya is a shambles. The question looms large on the horizon : Where do we go from here ?

The first phase of the Ram Rajya came to an end when the revisionist Gandhians failed in establishing a democratic social order which could have fulfilled the aspirations of Indian people roused during the decades of freedom struggle. Thereafter, rising on the crest of widespread popularity generated by the detestation of revisionists in general and Indira Gandhi in particular, came the puritan Gandhians to power. It was dinned into the credulous ears of Indians that if the Congress leaders had not deviated from the righteous path of Ram Rajya shown by the Mahatma and had honestly followed his theories and practices, all would have been well and the country would have achieved its destiny. To the people steeped in ignorance and dominated by medieval values this appeared plausible and the puritans were voted to power with thunderous applause in March 1977 elections. The new rulers took the earliest opportunity to assure the downtrodden millions that a new golden era guided solely by uncontami-

nated Gandhian principles was about to dawn; India would look inwards and draw inspiration from its ancient cultural heritage for rebuilding Indian society fallen during the dark foreign rule.

To the bewilderment of the puritans they found nothing original or constructive in Gandhian philosophy which they could offer to the people; willy nilly the new rulers had to follow in the footsteps of their predcessors. But since it was done under compulsion of circumstances it lacked sincerity and determination and the Janata Government presented a pale picture of what existed previously. The two stools on which Nehru stood became more shaky and difficult to hold. While the Congress masters could run the political machinery for three decades it took barely 28 months for the Janata to realise how unrealistic and unsuited the Mahatma's romanticism was for solving the imponderable problems of the poverty-stricken millions. The myth woven round Gandhi's ideology that it was something mysterious, magical, ennobling and spiritually elevating was shattered in the brief period. In fairness, one may say that the revisionists gave a better account of themselves than did the puritans. This was solely due to the fact that the former dared to ignore the more obscurantist notions of the Mahatma by introducing Western liberalism, industrialisation, science and technology in their scheme of things for the growth of backward Indian society.

The second and (let us hope) the last phase of Ram Rajya came to a close with the fall of Janata Government headed by Morarji Desai. It may prove a turning point in the political and cultural history of free India. But we shall have a long way to go before the country achieves its destiny: creation of a rational society and establishment of a democratic government. Today it is a far cry from the existing inequality of different classes to the goal of social freedom.

India stands at the crossroads of its history but its people do not have a clear vision in which direction to proceed. Diverse forces are pushing it on different paths to carry out their selfish designs and there is no group devoted to remove the disabilities and hardships of the masses. To be able to

select correctly, a new path has to be blazed which will lead Indian humanity to unfeterred freedom. It is, therefore, imperative to clearly know the impediments which have obstructed the country's progress in post-independence era.

India is encountering numberless problems : appalling ignorance, crushing unemployment, abysmal illiteracy, common lethargy, communal disharmony, social distinctions, superstitious beliefs, degrading traditions, soul-killing rituals, fatalism, squalor and disease. Attempts have no doubt been made by both the revisionists and puritans during the days of their respective rules to solve the problems but, as we have seen, with little success. It would, however, not be fair to the politicians to ascribe the failure solely to their widely-acknowledged lust for power, inefficiency, corruption and disregard of ethical principles. The main cause lies deeper : not only the problems but also the moral degeneration of the rulers stem from the medieval outlook of the people and the anachronistic values that they cherish. It is the source from which all the problems plaguing Indian people spring. No thought is given to it and, indeed, the pernicious outlook and obsolete values are applauded and fostered by most of the politicians as our invaluable cultural heritage and unrivalled spirituality. The inexcusable fault of the leaders lies in encouraging the pernicious outlook.

After the fall of Buddhism round about 500 A.D. Indian society entered what may be called a dark age similar in many respects to the Dark Age of Medieval Europe when ecclesiastic classes captured power and enslaved the entire society. The weapons of enslavement are the old religious texts to which new ones, produced by Brahmins, were added in the Gupta period.

Any attempt to analyse the themes dealt with in this vast holy literature is neither possible nor necessary; for our purpose it is sufficient to state the fundamental principles of life which are contained in the scriptures and blindly followed by the Hindus. The first is the hierarchical four-tier caste

system which divides Indians on the mere fact of birth. Through the many past centuries thc four castes have been further divided into thousands of subcastes which do not mingle with each other, neither intermarry nor interdine and are unfriendly with each other. Among the lower castes are untouchables who form nearly 20 per cent of the population.

The theory of transmigration of soul and rebirth is no less pernicious than the caste system. A Hindu believes that he will be reborn after death and the possibility is that he may come to life not as a human being but in the shape of any other creature—animal, bird, reptile, insect etc.

As a corollary of rebirth is the *karma* theory according to which a human being is poor or rich, healthy or sick, happy or unhappy not because of his virtues and vices or social environments in which he or she is placed in present life but as a reward or punishment for what he or she did in supposed previous births. The conception of luck, a devastating factor in life, has been derived from this theory.

We may not discuss the point how these theories have immensely benefited the upper castes led by Brahmins and Kshatriyas at the expense of lower castes who were reduced to a state of utter helplessness, destitution and penury in the Indian dark age. But anyone who possesses the least knowledge about this country and does not keep his eyes closed, should be aware of the fact how these theories have disastrously exerted noxious influence over the Indian mind. As a matter of fact, Indian character has been formed on their basis. There is hardly any Indian who can think, talk or act outside the orbit of these theories. This is the bane of Indian society.

An Indian is not taken into consideration in his homeland as a human being but as a member of a caste in which he is born and spends all his life. The *Bhagavad Gita* has vigorously upheld the three theories—caste, rebirth and *karma*—and Mahatma Gandhi has vigorously supported them. Even if through tremendous self-effort a low caste man attains higher social status, orthodox Hindus refuse to recognise it. When Jagjivan Ram, Defence Minister of India, unveiled a statue at Varanasi, local Hindus washed it

the next day with the holy water of the Ganga because Jagjivan is a born untouchable and had for that reason defiled the statue. With such divisive forces at work how can India unite or the Indians cooperate with each other in making social welfare plans or for that matter any plans, a success ?

Having been deprived of good things in this life an Indian little cares for anything. He is therefore consciously or unknowingly on way to despondency, fatalism and indifference to what happens to his life. He can be easily duped subdued, exploited and hoodwinked.

An Indian's observation, be he illiterate or educated, on attaining success or on suffering defeat, is that it was the result of his previous *karma*; he is at pains to drive out the thought from his mind that his own weaknesses or inadequacies were responsible for it. How can a nation of such predestinarians rebuild a fallen society or solve the countless problems with which it is dogged ? Apart from the three fundemental beliefs mentioned above there are a host of dogmas, superstitions, rituals, traditions, tenets, conventions, legends and customs which are found interspersed in Hindu religious texts and have become inalienable factors of Indian's charater. I have deliberately examined only one of the holy books, *Ramcharitmanas*, to show that it contains many of the false and deadly beliefs. It would not be possible to survey critically even a few other venerated scriptures which preach uglier cults and insalubrius notions destructive of better, higher and moral life. But there should be little doubt in the minds of progressive Indians that it is these most popular gospels widely preached which thwart the country's advancement.

For example, if the *Bhagavad-Gita* assures its admirers that it is not man himself who can uproot vice and defend virtue but must wait for a superman, an avatar, to descend from heaven and perform these tasks for humanity, how can a democratic spirit arise among people who cherish deepest faith in the theory ? Such teachings may be calculated to kill the sense of self-realiance among those who believe it to be true as all Hindus do. Notwithstanding its good intentions

and well-thoughtout economic, cultural and socialistic plans Indian leadership has increasingly met with failure because it did not comprehend the obvious. If the pace of popularising the holy texts like the *Ramcharitmanas* and *the Bhagvad-Gita* is maintained unchecked our problems will not only multiply but also become intractable and ungovernable.

More than ninety per cent of the evils which torment Indian society such as population explosion, dowry, humiliation of women, resignation of downtrodden to wretched poverty, atrocities inflicted by upper castes on humble folk, uncooperative spirit, superstitious beliefs and false notions can be traced to the holy texts.

If India is to come abreast with the developed nations—no one can deny that this is also the ambition of the revisionists as well as the puritans—it is imperative that we should drastically change the present cultural milieu, discard and repudiate the sacerdotal past and foster that part of our cultural heritage which can be linked with modern values. We have to uproot the cankerous growth which caused our degeneration and fall. Thus alone can India emerge as a progressive nation. And there will be no occasion for us to feel distressed at the end of our journey due to unfulfilled desires and aspirations.

India's past is not uniformally dark; no sensible person has said that; it has bright vistas which deserve glorification. But those men who have been in power and whose views matter in contemporary times, praise and honour the dark side. We should know that the views about spirituality we hold today were taught in the advanced nations of the West before European Renaissance. Therefore, historically, there is nothing new in them. It only affords our obscurantist leaders the satisfaction of being something unique from the rest of human society. Such thinking is a sign of backwhrdness and must undergo a transformation. That is the revolution which India direly needs. It is no doubt a stupendous task but it has to be accomplished in order that 650 million Indians are liberated from 2000-year old shackles with which they

have been bound not by any evil intentioned foreign rule but by the priestly philosophy and practices which abound in our land.

Unless and until this poisonous root of India's numerous ills is eradicated it is very hard, almost impossible, to march ahead and achieve genuine social democracy. Nevertheless, the immensity of the task cannot be underestimated. Some leaders when frustrated by defeats are fond of talking about "revolution" and introducing it. No one among them has so far to my knowledge spelled out in clear terms what they mean by revolution. Their description of it has shed little light and only created mental confusion. They want a revolution with basic doctrines of our archaic culture left untouchet. In briefest and unambiguous terms I have stated above what a revolution should mean and consist of in India. If it breaks out and is allowed to have its full course, the many problems above referred to and occupying the centre of the stage at present will no longer remain unmanageable.

The question remains who can serve as *avant garde* of the social revolution. To answer it we have to take many factors—historical, cultural and political—into account. To begin with, we have to be fully aware of the fact that nearly eighty generations of Indians have been drugged from childhood and deliberately kept ignorant of the essence of life by priestly vested interests; therefore, change in cultural climate can be a very slow and long process; it may take decades; it will depend on the speed with which irrational ideas are stamped out and new revolutionary forces allowed to rise to displace the old decadant social order.

The character of India's true revolution will be cultural and social and not political. Through capture of political power in the present cultural background no party is going to change the destiny of the country. In the prevailing ignorance politics vitiates thinking. Therefore politicians seeking power can only hamper progress and ill serve the revolution. Genuine revolutionaries will not pursue power but valiantly fight obscurantism, influence of false doctrines and godmen.

The battle has to be waged openly, valiantly and uncompromisingly. The start will necessarily be trying but once the movement picks up it may be optimistically expected to grow by geometrical progression.

Though thoroughly exposed as immoral, power-hungry, and opportunistic, the superannuated national leaders of all shades of opinion are loath to retire from the field and let new forces devoted to democratic and humanistic ideals rise from among the younger generation unless they are submissive and ready to follow the beaten path The immediate prospect is that more than ever before the old leadership of this or that party will manoeuvre to grasp power in their hands by fully using the rusty weapons forged in the past; the fogey group will try to show that it excels all others in the service of the nation, in selflessness, in patriotic virtues, in vast experience and high principles; ergo, it deserves to be equipped with power. Nothing, however, disgraceful or contemptible will be barred to make these attempts a success. Every strategem will be tried to achieve the purpose. Without any qualms the revisionists will join hands with puritans, secularists with communalists, rightists with leftists. The discredited leaders will continue to be active in the field and show that public affairs begin and end with them; they are the legitimate incumbents to hold reins of government.

As before the people especially the disinherited, deprived and disowned poorer classes will be defrauded by tempting promises in election manifestos of the parties and pronouncements of their top-ranking leaders. Shorn of accusations hurled against each other the manifestos and the pronouncements will be incredibly similar in substance.

The manifestos containing pledges and assurances will not be new or original in ideas or welfare schemes; anyone who labours to go through such documents issued since independence will find the same stuff in them.

No manifesto of political parties or statement of leaders will even by mistake refer to the outdated values or medieval outlook of the people and the necessity to replace them by

modern values and rational attitudes. Much less will there be any reference to the source from which harmful ideas spring. The leaders have never thought about it and if perchance it has struck someone among them he is most unlikely to jeopardise his public standing by expressing heretic views and thereby disturbing the hornet's nest.

Be it Indira Gandhi or Morarji Desai, Charan Singh or Jagjivan Ram, Chandra Shekhar or Raj Narain, Devraj Urs or H.N. Bahuguna or any other leader for that matter, no one is above board, All of them have without compunction trodden upon the principles which they themselves have been holding sacred and inviolable. Occasionally it is astounding to see that morality taught by a politician a few days earlier is transgressed later if it suits the occasion for achieving even a trivial aim. The leaders must have a very poor opinion of the power of memory and capacity for independent thinking of their compatriots.

The loud swearing by the name of the Mahatma and his moral principles will ceaselessly continue; the deterioration that has set in wlll deepen; therefore, the obscurantic outlook will not be replaced by a new enlightened one. No national leader or group will care to ponder the reasons that have led the country to the dismal pass and have stalled India's progress.

If the illiterate masses are unable to assess properly the post independence developments, intellectuals should have been able to realize that our troubles originate from the negative aspect of our ancient culture which is not relevant to the contemporary scientific age. We have to espouse values which can usher in an era of critical thinking, free minds and social emancipation; we have to create prerequisitcs for establishment of democracy.

What is the remedy? An organised band of sincere, devoted and steadfast young men should come forward who will uncompromisingly and fearlessly denounce the Ram Rajya and once again unfurl the flag of Indian renaissance and enlightement which has been folded up after independence

by narrow nationalism. We must bring about a complete social revolution. Only those young men and women who fully comprehend the nature, importance and potentialities of the social revolution as well as possess the courage of conviction to stand by it will become its harbingers. It is a far bigger and tougher task than was the struggle for freedom against British Imperialism. The stiff opposition of the leadership with deep faith in archaic notions and antiquated cults is bound to be encountered in its ferocity but that should not deter, discourage or dampen the spirit of revolutionary youth.

There are emancipated individuals—men and women—all over the vast land who have come to accept this view by their own study, observation, experience and contemplation, but being scattered and unorganised they cannot concretize the philosophy of revolution and being in isolation they feel helpless to cope with the gargantuan task.

National leaders are engaged in their subtle game of creating illusions to deceive multitudes struggling to liberate themselves from the clutches of tyranny of ancient culture and confused polil'cal leadership One of the illusions is the false distinction drawn between secularists and communalists which in reality does not exist for the mere fact that Indian nationalism is virtually communalism of the majority. Genuine secularism is inconceivable in a society which is predominantly religious; its regard for secularism cannot but be superficial; in practice. Indian secularists are not less sectarian than those who are dubbed as communalists.

India has arrived at a stage where fraudulent slogans will not be able to solve any pressing problem facing the country. For one thing, none of the existing political parties will be able to promote democracy or provide a competent, dependable and incorruptible administration.

For the first time in post-independence era Indians have to pass through an instability about the present and uncertainty about the future. It did not appear suddenly but step by step starting from the day of self-rule. How long it will last mostly depends on us. If we continue to pursue the old cliches and shibboleths and refuse to

learn through experience gained during the past three decades, or are successfully misguided once again by crafty and cunning politicians, there is bound to be a long period of trials, privations, disorder and restlessness. But if the people rise in revolt against the outworn beliefs which are holding them in slavery, the old leadership will be swept off and a new magnificent, progressive, productive and peaceful chapter open in our history. At this critical juncture we have to muster courage, carefully and dispassiontely analyse the situation and be prepared to accept a reality, however repugnant it may appear to us, and defy the common thought-currents which have held us in bondage.

Foreign rule enslaved our bodies but the negative cultural heritage has shackled our minds.

The time-worn philosophy propounded by shastras though applicable in ancient and medieval times, is no longer relevant or valid. To march ahead Indians have to crush the mental attitude born of this philosophy.

Whatever progress India has registered in industrialization and national economy is mostly due to foreign assistance through grants, debts and technological know-how liberally provided by developed countries. That is not to say that India lacks in intellect or intelligence. Abundant proofs are available in support of the assertion that among the developing countries India can legitimately claim to possess unrivalled brain power. But when thinking is hedged by degrading superstitions, pernicious traditions and inhuman customs intellect can by no means have full play nor can persons gifted with talent come into their own. Most of the Indian scientists and intellectuals are, let it be frankly acknowledged, superstitious traditionalists and repose faith in mystic powers, astrology and miracles of godmen.

The agony of India as of any other country in the Third World, is caused by the clash between the principles esteemed in medieval age and the rationalist-scientific values of contemporary times. The philosophy taught by the *Ramcharitmanas* or for that matter by any venerated holy book is incompatible with scientific culture. One who thinks

he is clever in supporting both cannot help being flustered; he only spreads confusion which leads the country away from its cherished goal and from its destiny. The current crisis is the bitter fruit of such cleverness.

India's nationalist politicians are in the habit of asseverating that they vanquished British Imperialism, the mightiest military power, through peaceful and non-violent struggle. If the claim is true why did the great heroes thrown up by the struggle suffer miserable days at the close of their lives and feel depressed and unhappy at the time of death. Mahatma Gandhi was a totally disappointed and frustraed man who despite his desire to live for 120 years, found solace in the embrace of death because "his life's work lay in ruins" as he sadly confessed. Before Jawaharlal Nehru passed away he confronted obstinate problems which heavily weighed on his mind and shattered him physcally and intellectually: he was, when death claimed him, brooding over the misfortunes that befell India. In the last days of his life Jayaprakash Narayan experienced fits of depression and unendurable agony to see his world in a shambles.

Instead of feeling exhilarated at their success in having overthrown foreign rule and liberated their homeland, why did these three giants and so many others like them though of lesser importance, die in despondency or continue to live in sorrow and cynicism? Why did Gandhi's heroic campaign for nearly four decades end in carnage, holocaust and bloodbath ? Why did his call for Hindu-Muslim unity result in estrangement of the two communities? Why did his intense desire of maintaining oneness of the subcontinent bring about Partition ? Why did Nehru's herculean efforts to found and establish Indian Democracy go hayware ? Why did Jayaprakash Narayan's creation—the Janata Party—which enjoyed tremendous popularity disintegrate and fall like a pack of cards ? Why did his slogan of "a revolution", a "total revolution" prove abortive ?

It is easy to blame the Indians as is incessantly done by the blind admirers of the national heroes by saying that the people failed to reach the high standards or comprehend the

lofty ideals set by the masters. Such shifting of blame or responsibility cannot satisfy the reasoning mind of an intellgent person. The truth is, as I see it, that the dismal failures are inherent in the outworn philosophy taught by the great men. Hence the fall and the consequent frustration and wailing.

No doubt, Jawaharlal Nehru spoke with transparent sincerity while advocating scientific views and the urgent need of technology; he also displayed marvellous courage in taking long strides in the field of industrialisation and establishment of scientific laboratories. But he reduced the value of the revolutionary deeds if not altogether get them nullified, by his emphasis on the populist belief that we could not break our connection with our counter-revolutionary past.

Indian people have not failed their mentors; it is very unfair to make that accusation, nor have the politicians done anything of the sort. The causes that have brought the country to near-anarchy and produced increasing numbers of famishing people lie elsewhere to which no attention is paid. Indian leaders have to realise and make the ignorant millions understand that in accepting twentieth century values of life alone can make hapless India prosperous and raise the hungry masses from the slough of wretchedness. No belief in *chaturvarnya*, *sansara*, or *karma* is going to make us great or spiritual or unique in the family of nations. The sooner we drive out such fatuous notion from our minds the better for us and for the whole world. Too much emphasis cannot be laid on the truth that democracy and Brahman culture are incompatible. We need a remaissance as did the West 300 yeais ago.

It is futile to harp on the inability of the people to follow the path shown by Gandhi, Nehru and Jayaprakash through decades while they lived. If the outcome of their teachings has been invariably contrary to expectation in post-independence period, wisdom would seem to consist not in castigating politicians or people but in critically examining the

ideals taught and trying to ascertain if they are sound and conducive to healthy growth of the nation in contemporary age.

It is true that capture of power has always and everywhere been the immediate aim of political activity. But when there are no high principles to guide it, no human values to fight for and no set rules to observe, the activity degenerates into an immoral pursuit as has happened in present-day India. Vying with each other, leaders of different political parties have destroyed all norms and standards of politics held sacred even in this country only some years ago. Today no holds are barred to play the game and vanquish the opponent by any means fair or foul; every principle worth the name is remorselessly trampled upon to achieve petty ends. If this is an illustration of the cultural heritage venerated by all national leaders it must create revultion in civilised minds.

However, if India has to be brought back from the brink of precipice where it precariously stands now the thinking has to be drastically changed. The time has come when the few selfless, sincere, and honest men and women should come out of self-imposed seclusion not to form a new political body or to capture political power but to found a movement for spread of rational thoughts and scientific values. The revulsion created by pervasive immorality in Indian society and the numerous problems confronted by an overwhelming majority of people has given rise to a revolutionary atmosphere which will electrify the country in days to come. On such occasions minds become receptive and new ideas spread rapidly. Even if a small beginning is made to metamorphose society the movement can speedily gain momentum and generate a climate for pushing out the old outmoded beliefs and ringing in the new lifegiving thoughts. What did not occur for centuries may take place today and the Indian society destroying all bondages—social cultural, economic and spiritual—achieve real freedom. But it is wellworth to remember that revolutions do not break out by themselves; prerequisites have to be created by popularising non-conformist and unconventional but progressive ideas and by organizing dispersed emancipated men and women to

lead people on the right path. And it would be ruinous to forget that an occasion for revolution is also an occasion for counterrevolution. The question is who takes time by the forelock. India is a country of frustrated revolutions. In the past enemies of revolution have invariably triumphed. Let not counter-revolutionaries derive the advantage again.

Postscript

The split in the Janata Party in August-September, 1979, neccessitated the holding of a mid-term poll to elect the seventh Lok Sabha. The result demonstrated the great change that had taken place in the thinking of Indian people during the thirty months of the Janta Party rule. On the one hand, intense discontent among people against the puritans who swore by Mahatma Gandhi and his ideals, had erupted and could no longer be doubted or concealed, on the other people had forgiven and mostly forgotten the atrocities inflicted on them during the emergency regime. Even Sanjay Gandhi's midemeanour was pardoned. In the absence of a truly democratic political body, the voters saw no alternative but to choose one of the existing parties which, in their eyes, merited power; that choice could not be other than Indira's Congress.

By giving Congress (I) an overwhelming majority of votes at the hustings, the people unambiguously expressed profound disgust of the puritans for their unceasing squabbles, corruption, inefficiency and incompetence to guide India towards freedom and happiness.

The election verdict did not necessarily indicate that every part of the political, economic and social philosophies practised by Indira Gandhi during the eleven years (1966-1977) of her office had been approved and accepted by the electorate. Nevertheless, it was clear that on crucial issues and essential matters she enjoys the support of the people. The lovers of freedom and democracy may not like it, but it would be unwise and dangerous to close our eyes to the fact.

Instead of feeling sulky and depressed, the people who hate authoritarian political philosophy, and despotic traits in Indira Gandhi's behaviour should ponder and make a dispassio-

nate assessment of the new situation created by her reemergence. The tendency to self-deception has to be discarded and a climate for building up democratic institutions generated by deprecating anachranistic views, by encourgement of critical attitude and dissemination of egalitarian ideals and modern values which are woefully lacking in our people.

Democracy does not hang in the air; it is a way of life and has a basis in rational culture on which it can be firmly erected. Devoid of that cultural base, democracy serves merely as a slogan which politicians raise to hoodwink people in general and the voter in particular during the electioneering period.

None of the political parties which fought for power in the recent elections dared to denounce archaic theories but constantly laid stress on preservation and maintenance of vicious systems in the name of ancient culture, which are harmful to the healty growth of developing nations. Whatever else the cultural heritage propagated by Indian nationalist leaders may stand for, it certainly contains seeds of authoritrianism as its inalienable part. Those, therefore, who extol such pernicious doctrines are unfit to lead Indian people to the goal of democracy.

It was not the dictatorship of Indira Gandhi during her rule of over a decade that made her unpopular but the atrocities inflicted on brave and outspoken politicians and innocent people that brought about her downfall. In addition to the favourable political atmosphere created for her comeback by the misdeeds of Janata leaders, it was the belief in superman cult taught by Hindu scriptures and vigorously supported by nationalist politicians of all hues which helped her to regain charisma and win the elections. One who underestimates this fact fails to comprehend the core of Indian politics.

Among independent candidates there were, here and there, sincere, fearless and intelligent individuals some of whom were dedicated to liberal principles and democratic ideals but, significantly, not one of them won and all forfeited security deposits for not polling sufficient votes.

I believe that neither in 1977 elections nor in the recent poll the tussle was between authoritarianism and democracy, because, ideologically, all the contestants reposed faith in avatarship theory which is negation of democracy. It was a sort of family feud for capture of power and not for vindication of any noble or high principle. To believe that Janata's victory in 1977 ushered in a great revolution or brought about a second independence of India was to court self-deception. Of all the Indian politicians, Indira Gandhi possessess the qualifications which entitle her to be an avatar (dictator) in the eyes of the people; hence her triumph at the hustings.

Until a social and intellectual revolution breaks out in India to shatter medieval mode of thinking, one election will follow another but in essentials the country will remain static and people will not take a single step forward. Indeed, conditions will continue to deteriorate and the dumb, downtrodden and poverty-stricken millions will suffer and remain in a miserable state.

The result of recent elections is not without a glimmer of hope. It is very encouraging that, like Indira Gandhi in 1977, Charan Singh too held fair, free and impartial elections. At least in this respect the Indian Constitution has stood the test of time. It augurs well for the future of Indian democracy and should be a source of strength to freedom fighters.

There is little doubt that all big guns in Indian politics have lost credibility with the people. It was in their utter helplessness that the electorate had to make a choice of one from a number of parties who had all failed to deliver goods. Indira Gandhi came out with flying colours from the fight because, among other things, the voters held her opponents in contempt and not because she has endeared herself to the common man. It is rightly termed a negative victory.

The euphoria generated by the victory in the Congress (I) camp did not last long; it vanished in a couple of days. There were no illuminations in the country and no jubilations in freedom-loving political circles.

Giving only 42.58 per cent of the votes polled to

Congress (I), the people have chosen the new Government on a minority vote which indicates that more than half of the people who went to the polls are opposed to the party which captured power. It is not without significance and the case for democracy is not lost beyond redemption.

Indira Gandhi will soon be confronted with stupendous problems; she is not unaware of them because they were there before she was overthrown in 1977; only with passage of time they have grown in number and some of them have become more obstinate. She has no magic wand to abolish abysmal poverty, bring down sky-rocketting prices of essential commodities, protect low caste multitudes from heartlesss persecution by upper caste tyrants, bring about communal concord, stop population explosion, provide employment to millions of illiterate and educated without jobs, end corruption, destroy mass illiteracy and even restore law and order.

Admitting that she and her close colleagues misbehaved during her previous tenure of office, her enthusiastic followers eagerly hope, if not dogmatically assert, that having learnt through bitter experience she has turned a new leaf in her style and will render a better account of herself in the days and years to come.

It is a gain that a stable and strong government has been installed at the centre and it would be unfair to prejudge it. In making India progressive and prosperous stability goes far but not far enough. It can be the first step towards democratisation but there is the likelihood that it may be utilised to smash democratic institutions and establish despotic rule. Humans, particularly politicians, are averse to change after a certain age, almost surely when past sixty.

Already within a month of assuming power, Indira Gandhi is again at her old game She has recalled some of her favourites of doubtful antecedents and appointed them on key posts; she has persecuted honest officials for having loyally discharged their duties under the Janata rule, struck terror in the administration and demoralised the Press, AIR, TV and the Judiciary which, it must be admitted, had remained, for whatever reasons, comparatively non-partisan, if not completely

free, under the predecessor regime.

Saying that "the Delhi police is apparently making a deliberate attempt to conceal a spate of crimes in the city recently" the *Indian Express* narrated on February 2, the scores of snatchings, thefts, robberies, dacoities, bulgalaries, pick-pocketings etc. giving every detail of the incidents. The daily added: "These crimes which have taken place in the city during past two days relate only to areas covered by five police stations. There being about 60 police stations in the city, it becomes startlingly obvious that the police claim of reduction in crime is a canard being flouted for the sake of a gullible populace." Four days later, on February 6, the daily published another long list of crimes which the police did not include in its bulletins.

In the sphere of foreign affairs, non-alignment has begun to be distored and disfigured. The Janata rulers kept India at an equal distance from Big Power Blocs. Now the foreign policy has suddenly tilted towards USSR as previously under Congress rule. The Soviets have flgrantly violated the sovereignty of Afghanistan, militarily occupied it by despatching thousands of army mcn into the country. Though the Prime Minister issued more than one statement on the Soviet aggression which might involve India in a world conflagration, she has been contradictory in her views. She has taken pains to exonerate the Russians from the charge of aggression. Astoundingly, she has said that it is an internal affair of Afghanistan. One wonders what her attitude would have been if instead of Russia it were America to occupy a country of the Third World. No, her partiality cannot dupe anyone with an iota of intelligence.

What does all this signify? Has Indira Gandhi changed and can her critics and opponents expect a fair deal from her? The answer is in the womb of future and only time will reveal. For the present we should patiently wait and watch.

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